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BANDWAGON

THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1982

# BANDWAGON



## THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Vol. 26, No. 6 NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1982

Fred D. Pfening, Jr. Editor

Joseph T. Bradbury and Fred D. Pfening III, Associate Editors

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### THIS MONTH'S COVER

The sponsored date is nothing new. In 1909 the Campbell Bros. circus opened its season indoors at Kansas City, Missouri with an eight day stand sponsored by the local zoo. Such an arrangement was then called a "benefit" date, and this program cover was specially created for that engagement. In 1909 Cambell Bros. was on 28 cars, and played a typical "high grass" route through the plains states.

The background of the lettering is in a dark, rich red, and the foliage is a lush green, reflecting the tropical setting. The *Bandwagon* title has replaced the announcement that the show was playing "Convention Hall 8 days beginning Sat. night Apr. 17th." Original in Pfening Archives.

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If you have moved and not advised the *Bandwagon* of your new address, you will miss an issue. The post office will advise us of your new address at a charge of 35¢. The address will be changed for the following issue, but a second copy of the magazine cannot be sent free of charge.

So rather than miss a copy advise us of your new address in advance.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION as required by 39 U.S.C. 3685.

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.

(Signed)  
Fred D. Pfening, Jr.  
Publisher

## GREG PARKINSON PROMOTED AT CIRCUS WORLD MUSEUM

William L. Schultz, Executive Director of the Circus World Museum, announced on November 18, 1982 that Greg Parkinson has been promoted to Program and Endowment Director.

A major responsibility assigned to Parkinson will be coordinating the museum's summer season program: big top shows, wagon loading demonstrations, music concerts and all daily live displays.

Parkinson will also initiate a new endowment program for the library and Research Center, the development of a volunteer program, and the organization of special historic presentations. He will also handle special writing projects including the annual program report.

Parkinson will continue his work as Associate Parade Coordinator working with the museum staff in organizing and staging the annual Chicago Circus Parade.

Greg Parkinson joined the museum staff in 1978 as the Assistant Director of the Research Center. His articles on circus history have been published in the programs of the Ringling-Barnum Circus, the *Bandwagon*, as well as other publications. He has been a member of the Circus Historical Society since 1964.

## THANKS TO CIRCUS PROGRAM CHS REFERENCES

The officers of the Circus Historical Society extend their special appreciation to Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows, Carson & Barnes Circus, Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus, and Circus Vargas for their continued listing of the CHS in their program magazines.

Each of these circuses have published a description of the activities of the CHS and listed an address for interested persons to write for membership applications.


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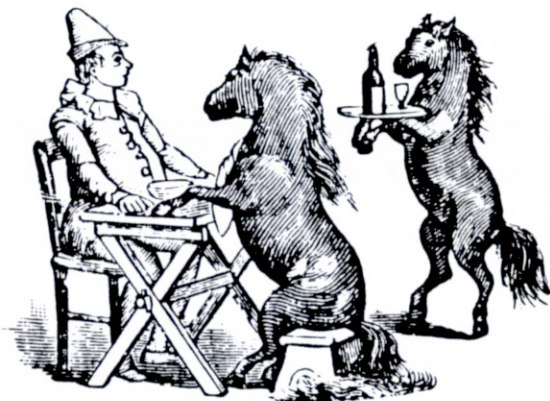
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# The Bode Wagon Company

by Frederick Dahlinger, Jr.

Located on the Ohio River and acting as a link between the northern and southern economies, Cincinnati played an important part in the history of the circus. It was the home of the John Robinson Circus as well as other shows, and a major theatrical lithographing and tent manufacturing center. Two local newspapers carried circus columns in the 1850's, and in 1894 the *Billboard*, mightiest of all circus trade journals, began publication there. By the end of 1901 the *Billboard* noted that "Cincinnati just at present is the Mecca of many showmen."<sup>1</sup> After one of the city's wagon builders filled an order for a local circus, the showman's bible affirmed "He has fully sustained the reputation of this city as the great headquarters for all kinds of show supplies."<sup>2</sup>

As early as 1867 show wagons were constructed in Cincinnati, an order being filled that year for Dan Castello.<sup>3</sup> The builder may have been Henry Ohlsen, Sr., who opened his doors in 1864, the first of many Queen City circus wagon manufacturers. A carriage builder named Louis Havekotte was Ohlsen's partner from the early 1870's until 1875 when the firm was bankrupted by its involvement in the America's Racing Association. Ohlsen kept the plant and the debts, and later gained fame for his special ability to construct the peculiar steam calliope wagon. Havekotte struck out on his own, entering into partnership with William Bode (1835-1914) in 1878. Three years later they constructed several parade wagons for John Robinson.<sup>4</sup> Bode sold his interest to Charles Puhlman in May 1885, and thereafter established a wagon and plow building firm in his own name at the northwest corner of Livingston and Central Avenue.

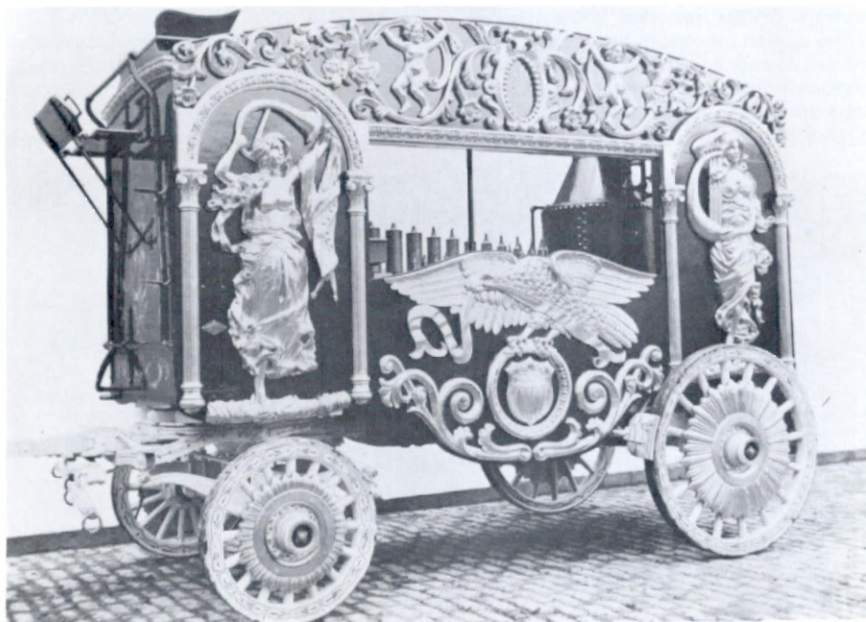
The management of the Bode business was assumed by William's son Albert W. Bode (1869-1928) sometime prior to 1902. Albert Bode proceeded to enlarge the firm and increase sales significantly. Al Bode, as he was better known, later operated a real estate firm and was a local Republican kingpin in the last two decades of his life.<sup>5</sup>

Bode (pronounced Bo-de') built up a large and thriving business construct-

The brass Bode nameplate and peculiar footbrake are seen in this 1902 photo of the Sells & Downs steam calliope taken at the Bode plant before shipment to the show. The white sheet background was used to ease later opaquing of the negative. Jack Richmond photo via Arthur Dicken. Albert Conover Collection.

Bode's 1928 letterhead proclaimed it was "the Cincinnati firm with a national reputation," which indeed it was to showmen. The lettering is in black only. Pfening Archives.

ting massive baggage, cage and parade wagons for both leading and obscure showmen. The Bode wagons were railroad show vehicles, built stronger than those of the 1880's and 1890's, and constructed to carry heavier loads to minimize the number of wagons and consequent train length. The wagons were basically large boxes, modified as required, with bars in the sides for cages, or carvings nailed on the sides for parade vehicles. The wheel diameters were reduced since they would no longer encounter rutted country roads as did





overland show vehicles. However, wet circus grounds required the contact area between the wheel and the ground be increased to support the wagons' great weight, and thus the tire widths were increased.

A number of design features employed by Bode serve today to identify his products. In 1902 and 1903, and infrequently as late as 1906, he employed a peculiar footbrake consisting of a long round bar, spanning the length of the footboard, supported at both ends by vertical bars whose pivots were near the base of the wagon. Bode used carved outside sunburst wheels almost exclusively on his

A peacock for India is being glued and clamped in the foreground while men at scroll saw are cutting out blanks for more carvings. On the back wall is the artwork for the wagon incorporating the Cornelia and her Jewels carving, indicating it was originally part of the Spellman group. Jack Richmond photo via Arthur Dicken. Albert Conover Collection.

An artist is working up a full scale drawing for the 1917 Spellman Germany tableau while one for India is on the wall. Peacocks for India are being carved. The Cornelia and her Jewels carving and the lion carving were later on Barnes and Sparks wagons respectively. Jack Richmond photo via Arthur Dicken. Albert Conover Collection.

parade wagons, unlike the conventional sunburst wheels used by others. The most positive identification is made by the presence of a diamond shaped brass nameplate affixed to the side of the wagon, examples of which can be seen in photographs of the 1902 Sells & Downs calliope and the snake den and Germany bandwagon built for the Ringlings in 1903. Another Bode arrangement was the stepped wagon body front which lowered the driver's seat position. The 1902 Columbia, 1903 Great Britain, Germany, United States and the c.1905 Berger-Sargent calliope are of this style. Since at least two of these

were rebuilt without the steps, one assumes showmen did not care for the arrangement.

Students of parade wagon history have often remarked that a particular wagon had a "Bode look" to it, an observation based on the general appearance and configuration of the carvings. This casual observation based on the general appearance and configuration of the carvings is now confirmed by the fact Bode employed his own artists and hired Spanish and Portuguese woodcarvers to execute the designs.<sup>8</sup> This practice differed from other manufacturers such as Sebastian and Moeller, who utilized Samuel Robb and the Milwaukee Ornamental Carving Company, respectively, to furnish the applied decoration for the wagon bodies. This "in-house" expertise also explains the duplication of a number of design elements in several vehicles. In particular the following themes are repeated:

Eagle with banner in beak — 1902 Sells & Downs calliope, 1902 Columbia, 1903 United States.

Winged female figures — the central figures on Columbia, United States, and the c.1902 Sipe and 1903 Great Wallace bandchariots.

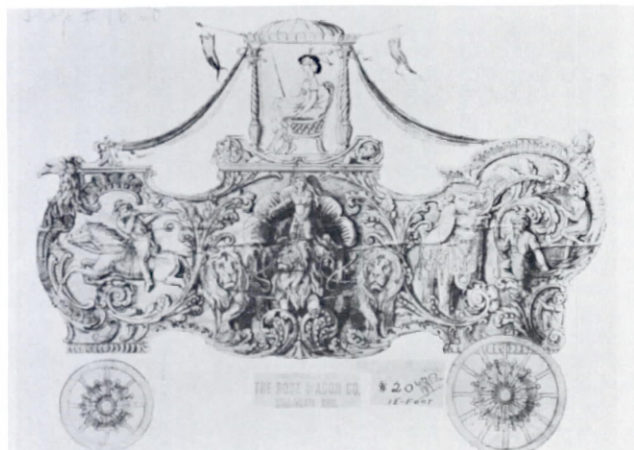
Elephants — three elephant tabs, all essentially the same, 1906 Sells-Floto, 1906 Carl Hagenbeck and carvings later on Al G. Barnes.

Segmented grooved shells or fans — Hagenbeck calliope, dancing girls tab, "John Robinson" calliope.

Cupid type musicians — Berger Sargent calliope, Sparks calliope, Harp & Jesters calliope, Hagenbeck-Wallace calliope.

Females in arches — Sells & Downs

A proposed Spellman vehicle was this ornate 18 foot tableau, possibly designed for an earlier effort since it was not on a truck body. The configuration is similar to the Hagenbeck and Ferrari bandwagons. Jack Richmond photo via Arthur Dicken. Albert Conover Collection.



calliope, United States and Ringling snake den.

Bode did two basic designs which were employed twice. The 1902 Columbia and 1903 United States are extremely similar, as are the c.1902 Sipe and 1903 Great Wallace bandchariots. The Bode carvings are massive, in some cases the relief being seven inches deep, as on the c.1919 Hagenbeck-Wallace calliope. Unfortunately the artistic merit of the carvings were not equal to those of Samuel Robb, the Bode artisans having particular problems in creating reasonable human likenesses in the flat images.

The effects of the panic of 1893 were felt until the turn of the century. One result was that very few new parade vehicles were constructed in the 1890's. It is therefore understandable that Albert Bode's earliest recorded circus wagon construction took place in 1901 when he built two dens for the John Robinson show. Business picked up in 1902 with at least two dozen vehicles being constructed for four different shows.

The Ringlings also ordered wagons from Bode in late 1902. Much has been made of this act, construed in some quarters as being a turning of the back on their usual builder, their cousins, the Moellers of Baraboo. In fact, during the 1902-1903 winter the Moellers not only had their usual Ringling repair business and possibly work for the Gollmars who were going out on rails in 1903, but also the order for seven floats for the Ringlings' "Nations of the World" parade.<sup>7</sup> Quite possibly the Moeller shop could not have turned out all of these vehicles. This massive building effort for 1903 was to counter Barnum & Bailey's return to America featuring 13 big New York built parade wagons. The directors of Barnum & Bailey, Ltd. noted the order to Sebastian for the first 12 vehicles on January 14, 1902; however, the Ringlings did not confirm their order to Bode until December 17, 1902, perhaps a date too late for the Moellers to have pushed the vehicles out of their doors for a Ringling opening date of April 9, 1903.<sup>8</sup> As it was, Bode didn't ship two of the wagons until March 24, 1903.<sup>9</sup>

The Ringlings specified three of the wagons to be tableaux named United States, Great Britain and Germany, the name of the fourth tableau to be selected by their spec scenery designer, John Rettig.<sup>10</sup> Rettig selected Russia for the fourth tableau. Later a snake den and a wagon to carry a George Kilgen pipe organ were also ordered from Bode.

Surviving Bode-Ringling correspondence gives some indication why the Ringlings may not have returned to Bode. By the original contract, payment for the wagons was



The Bode-built organ wagon is seen in a circa 1903 Ringling parade. It was part of the group built over the winter of 1902-1903, which also included the four nation wagons and a snake den. This wagon was dropped soon after it joined the Ringling show. Trimpey negative in Albert Conover Collection.

due after shipment. Bode wrote the Ringlings on March 18, 1903, complaining about his financial burdens and asking for a check to relieve the obligations.<sup>11</sup> When the Ringlings asked for a price for the organ wagon, Bode put them off until the wagon was almost done, indicating they would be satisfied with it at his price, adding at the bottom of the letter in script, "If not, kick & we will make it all right."<sup>12</sup> To Bode's credit, however, he noted that "we wanted to be as easy as possible (sic) on you since [this] was our first dealings (sic) with you." Bode also informed Otto Ringling "we have delayed all our other work trying to get your work out in time" and that "we are about 8 weeks behind on some of our work."<sup>13</sup>

Bode furnished much of the equipment for the all-new Carl Hagenbeck Circus in 1905. The calliope and big band wagon, both Bode products, are seen in this lot scene of either 1905 or 1906. J.W. Beggs photo.



The real falling out with Bode came when technical difficulties arose with the heavy carved wheel skirts fitted to Germany and Russia. Carved skirt-boards over the rear wheels prohibited removing the rear wheels easily, and the front gears were lengthened crosswise to carry similar skirts. One can imagine the difficulty of turning the wagon on uneven ground, the front skirt assembly wedging upwards against the wagon body. Surviving Ringling correspondence sheds no light on how, or if, these problems were ever resolved. The only subsequent contact between a Ringling show and Bode possibly came in 1908, when a Bode steam calliope turns up on Barnum & Bailey.

Bode was honored with the order for building the largest group of new wagons in circus history in 1905, when he was paid \$38,000 to build 48 wagons for the all new Carl Hagenbeck Trained Animal Show. The appearance of this rare and doomed bird, a 100% new circus, was magnificent, drawing the general attention of the profession. The parade vehicles represented a clear difference from the wagons Sebastian and Moeller built in 1903, being in the mold of Bode's 1903 Ringling wagons, able to carry a large baggage load. The Hagenbeck show owners called upon Bode to furnish two additional

tableaus for 1906, the construction of these vehicles being the subject of a remarkable letter from C. Lee Williams, manager of the Hagenbeck show, to Frank R. Tate, one of the owners. Writing from Cincinnati on December 19, 1905, Williams was transmitting designs of the new India and elephant tableau wagons for approval after Bode had dropped them off at the Grand Opera House. Williams related;

Bode was just in and submitted the two sketches of the India tableau wagons which I think are very pretty and will make two very swell wagons and in which we will have a world of room for the costumes of the show as these wagons are to be 16 feet clear on the inside. The one wagon with the elephant on it is to be all carving while the other one is to be carving where I have marked and moulding where I have marked and painting where I have marked. The two panels or pictures of the tiger and the men and the Zebu wagon are to be done in fancy painting. The wagons are to be same as all other stuff first class in every way. Bode brought his figures down on these wagons and the way he has it marked out the carved wagon will cost him to build it and turn it out in first class manner 1650.00 and the other wagon will cost him over 1100.00. I told him our limit was 2500.00 on the 2 and he said will if you want these wagons the very best I can do is 3000.00 for the two otherwise I will have to pass them up for I am surely entitled to some profit on them and the wagons will cost me to build not a cent less than 2700.00 as these have to be made extra in the bodies to care (sic) the weight that will be in them as the costumes run into weight when you get a lot of them as you will have as they will all have to go into boxes and these boxes weigh also. I told him that I would send them to you and you could decide as to how you felt on the matter of the price on them and advise me on the return of the sketch which pleased do Frank as soon as you get them so John [H. Havlin, the other partner] can see them and he can get the work in the shop for he only takes the work on this condition as he has his shop filled with work up to June, now, he refused to build 3 cages for John Robinson the other day outright and the Gov is sore as the devil. Wallace also called him over the phone the other day from Peru and told him to



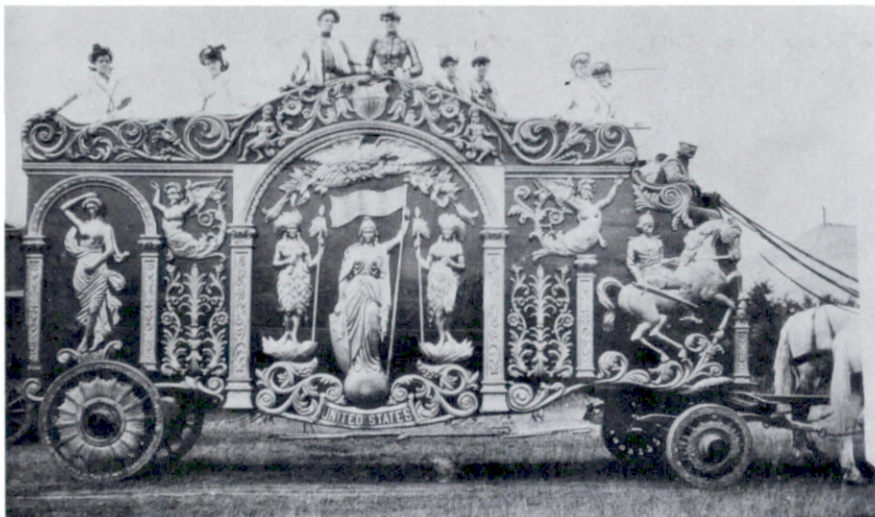
Bode built similar elephant tableaus for Barnes, Hagenbeck, and Sells-Floto. This is the Sells-Floto unit in 1914 when it was the number one bandwagon. Pfening Archives.

come up there at his expense and bring his designs and he would buy some cages, tableaus, and band wagon on the order of the Hagenbeck stuff. Bode told him that he was figuring with us for a line of stuff and if the order was placed he could not build him a thing. Wallace said well that was funny that Hagenbeck had the call on the shop. Bode said my shop is full of work and I can't over work my men and my machines or they will all break down and then I can't deliver the stuff and there is more trouble. Wallace said he would be down here the last of the week to talk with them. Tammen after fooling around with Bode and keeping him on the fence at last came here last Thursday and put [in] an order for 5 cages 1 tableau and 1 band wagon and took two sketches with him for two more

The kid show for the Carl Hagenbeck Circus, probably in Mexico, 1906. On right is the small lion tableau built by Bode. Pfening Archives.



tableaus to report on the last of this week. Bode took his order but refused to build him some baggage wagons as he told him I can't deliver them till June 1st if I do, and if you want to place the order that way all right let her go otherwise get some one else to make them. I can't and I really ought not to touch the other order but as I have promised I will take it for April delivery, not before, so they signed the contract on those lines. Bode has got his shop full of ice wagons and brewery wagons he is building, as well as the greatest lot of repair work I ever saw. The shoppes (sic) are full, the yard's full of wagons of every kind and the street. He is going over the entire equipment of the Combined Ice Co. as well as the Moerlein Brewing Co. and putting them in shape and building a lot of new ice wagons and beer wagons besides repairs on fire co. wagons and city work. He is now starting his shop at six A.M. and running till 6 P.M. He charged Tammen from 200 to 500 per wagon more than he charged us for our stuff. He howled like the devil at the price but Bode said take it or not I don't care a whit, rather you would refuse it and go some



where else. Tammen said well dam if you ain't all they claim for you and then some; if you don't want, you won't and that ends it. We'll fix the contract and I will sign it. I got to have Bode stuffs its the best ever so have to pay the price I guess all though I am sure Hagenbeck gets [it] cheaper. Bode said well no matter what they pay thats [the] price to you and I hope you won't accept it as I will have to work like a dog to get it out on time. I thought I would get a few weeks rest this winter and to to the coast with my family as I need it but all these orders will keep me here again this winter day and night.

The letter continues concerning Bode's reluctance to build grandstand seats for the Hagenbeck show but that he was building some floats for

There is just enough clearance in the building for workmen to assemble the body of one of the 1917 Spellman tableau bodies. The drawing for the Russian coat of arms is in the background. Jack Richmond photo via Arthur Dicken. Albert Conover Collection.

This side view of the United States tableau on the Ringling show in the early 1900's exemplifies the fine Bode craftsmanship. This wagon was abandoned at Sarasota, and many of its carvings have been preserved in private collections. Pfening Archives.

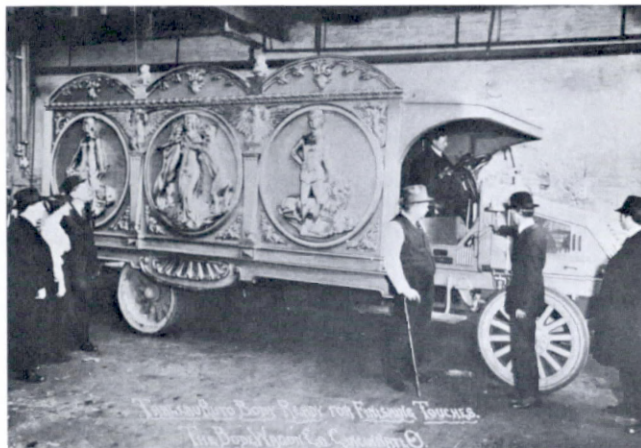
the show.<sup>14</sup> The December 23, 1905 *Billboard* noted that Harry H. Tammen had been in Cincinnati on December 16 to negotiate wagons from Bode, the independent minded wagon builder being one of the few people to have bested that Denver hustler. Certainly Bode wasn't being "easy" on these fellows and at this time he could afford to, there being no end to good business in sight. After being treated so rudely by Bode, Ben Wallace did get the last laugh. Only thirteen months after being rebuffed Wallace was able to acquire the entire lot of wagons Bode had built for the Hagenbeck show, and at a fraction of their original cost.

The glamor of the circus finally got to Bode and in 1908 he completely outfitted the Coney Island Hippodrome Co. Circus. This was a static tented affair on Coney Island's Surf Ave., between 20th and 21st Streets. By some

means, possibly in partial payment for the wagons, Bode had acquired the former Carl Hagenbeck big top, which was used to house the show. A street parade was featured, including a large steam calliope furnished by Bode. The affair was a disaster, closing only two days after it had opened on May 30.<sup>15</sup> To recoup his losses Bode may have operated the show on his own, at least that was what the June 13, 1908 *Clipper* reported.

The big wagon building boom waned and in the ensuing years a variety of orders were received from almost all the leading circuses with the exception of Ringling-operated shows. The orders ranged from a single wagon to seven, with possible orders for unrecorded baggage wagons exceeding those numbers. Bode's last large order came in 1917 when he was selected to supply and mount the truck bodies for Frank J. Spellman's ill fated U.S. Motorized Circus. The order was well suited to Bode, who was in the process of realigning his product line from wagons to custom truck bodies. This famous group of wagons has been the subject of much research and controversy, some of which will probably never be resolved. Two of the mysteries relate to the Al G. Barnes show. Barnes cage #29, a four section cage with a skyboard later mounted on the calliope, had side cover panels which duplicate in painting the carved scenes on the sides of the Spellman Africa. The cage panels date to c.1914 whereas the Spellman wagons are three years later.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Bode hardware, specifically the distinctive footbrake, appears on a Barnes oval mirrored tableau, in spite of having no documentation linking Barnes to Bode in the early 1910's.

The man with the cane is Albert W. Bode, shown here inspecting the South America tableau truck before shipment. This photo appeared in the May 1917 issue of *Scientific American*. Jack Richmond photo via Arthur Dicken. Albert Conover Collection.





The Spellman wagon bodies represent a style of wagon different from the previous wagons Bode built. Many incorporate an abundance of furniture and architecture styled moldings, scrollwork and painting, and less in the way of carved figures. Generally the carvings are simpler in execution but still presented an impressive array of workmanship.

As was typical of most newly launched circuses, Spellman's was under capitalized. P. J. Hart, a mechanic for Kelly-Springfield, which supplied the Spellman trucks, was assigned to go on the road with the trucks. In a 1962 interview he recalled delivering a check for \$75,000 to Bode to pay for the truck bodies, as Bode would not release them without payment.<sup>17</sup> Due to this transaction Kelly-Springfield ended up owning the Bode bodies, not Spellman or Bode, and this explains why the truck builder later sold the bodies. Artwork for the Germany tableau and a tableau incorporating the "Cornelia and Her Jewels" carving can be seen in the accompanying photos, along with other carvings which were later sold to the Sparks and Barnes circuses. A note in the January 12, 1918 *Billboard* commented on the fact that a recent fire at the Bode factory had threatened some Spellman advance cars, so it is possible Kelly-Springfield did not acquire title to all of the 1917 vehicles.

After Bode's death in 1928 his son, Albert Hagenbeck Bode, carried on the business until 1934, when he formed a partnership with Ray Finn, who owned a construction equipment sales business. The original Bode factory at 1653-1657 Central Avenue was torn down in 1935.<sup>18</sup> Probably at this time the bulk of the Bode files and photos were taken to a summer home they owned and were destroyed in a fire which consumed the structure. The Bode-Finn Company continues in business today; however, no records from wagon building days survive.

Credit is due Albert Conover, Bob Miefert, Greg Parkinson and Fred D. Pfening III for their assistance in the preparation of this article.

The Francis Ferari Carnival bought this fine bandwagon from Bode. It was later sold to the Leon Washburn Carnival, and still later, appeared on the Johnny J. Jones Carnival. This picture is reproduced from the June 21, 1913 *Billboard*. Albert Conover Collection.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. *Billboard*, December 28, 1901, p. 9.
2. *Billboard*, December 1, 1900, p. 9.
3. *New York Clipper*, March 23, 1867, p. 399.
4. *Cincinnati Times-Star*, April 9, 1881.
5. *Cincinnati Enquirer*, October 18, 1928.
6. Bode Album, Cincinnati Historical Society.
7. The "Nations of the World" motto is mentioned in a letter from the Ringlings to John Rettig dated December 17, 1902. Circus World Museum. This particular theme was employed long before 1903 by other circuses, and would still be used decades later.
8. Minute Book of Directors' Meetings, Barnum & Bailey, Ltd., Vol. 1, p. 114, Joseph T. McCaddon Collection, Princeton University Library; Letter from Ringling Bros. to Bode Wagon Co. dated December 17, 1902, Fred D. Pfening III Collection.
9. Letter from Albert Bode to Otto Ringling, March 23, 1903. Circus Collection, Milner Library, Illinois State Library, Normal, Illinois, Hereafter cited ISU.
10. Loc. cit.
11. Letter from Albert Bode to Ringling Bros., March 18, 1903. ISU.
12. Letter from Albert Bode to Ringling Bros., March 10, 1903. ISU.
13. Loc. cit.
14. The late L.L. Johnson obtained this letter from the Peru winterquarters years later.
15. *Billboard*, April 18, 1908, p. 22; *New York Clipper*, April 25, 1908, p. 270.
16. *Bandwagon*, January-February 1962, p. 11.
17. Hart was interviewed by Dick Schillhahn on May 6, 1962. Richard E. Conover note file.
18. *Billboard*, January 5, 1935, p. 38.

#### Appendix

##### Bode Wagon Co. Wagons

- ( ) Contemporary references  
[ ] Secondary references

#### Key

1. Wagon at Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin
2. Carvings in private collections

3. Carvings at Circus World Museum
4. Wagon at Ringling Museum of the Circus, Sarasota, Florida
5. Carvings at Miami County Historical Society Museum, Peru, Indiana
6. Owned by Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows, Inc.
7. Wagon at Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan

1901 John Robinson

Two dens 15 ft. long by 6 ft. wide, one den 15 ft. long by 7 ft. wide with statues on four corners—the existence of these cages has not been confirmed.

(*Billboard*, 2-9-1901, p.9)

1902 Forepaugh—Sells

Columbia bandwagon<sup>1</sup> (*BB*, 3-1-1902, p.6), [*Bandwagon*, IX, 1, p. 14]

Great Wallace

Bandchariot Harry Parkhurst, Sr., a long time Wallace elephant handler, said this 22 foot wagon cost \$1750 new and had to be rebuilt two years later at a cost of \$1200. The reason is unknown; structural failure is suspected. (*BB*, 12-28-1901, p. 9)

John Robinson

Three cages and one ornamental performing den for side show, extendable to 20x40 (*BB* 2-22-1902, p. 6) Many of the famous cottage cages exhibit Bode trademarks, at least three having the peculiar Bode brake and outside sunburst wheels. Likely Bode products are #36, #57 and #74.

Sells & Downs

Two tableaus (clowns & curtains, lion and dragons), ticket wagon, fifteen cages, steam calliope<sup>1</sup> (*BB* 3-1-1902, p. 6; 3-8-1902, p. 6; 4-5-1902, p. 5) [*BW*, VI, 2, pp. 10-11; I, 5, pp. 8-9; I, 2, pp. 5-6; VII, 1, p. 18; XIII, 6, p. 24]

c.1902 Sipe Dog & Pony Show Sandchariot (later on Mighty Haag)

1903 John Robinson

Horn steam calliope (*BB* 1-3-1903, p. 4) [*BW*, XIII, 6, p. 22]

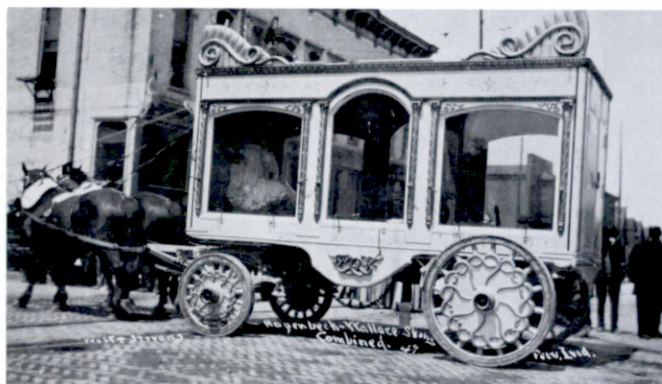
Ringling Bros.

- Bandwagons United States<sup>2</sup> (\$1500), Great Britain<sup>1</sup> (\$1500), Germany<sup>2</sup> (\$1900), Russia<sup>3,2</sup> (\$1900), snake den<sup>1</sup> (\$850), pipe organ wagon (\$1425) — organ by George Kilgen, St. Louis [BW, V, 6, pp. 3-6; XIX, 2, p. 30; documents in Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin.]
- c.1905 Berger-Sargent (carnival circus show)  
Steam calliope (later on Yankee Robinson)  
[BW, II, 5, p. 6; XIII, 6, p. 24]
- 1905 Carl Hagenbeck  
48 wagons valued at \$38,000 including bandwagon, three tableaux (Lion<sup>4</sup>, Elk & Buffalo<sup>5</sup>, Lion & Snake<sup>6</sup>), steam calliope, ticket wagon, numerous carved cages, baggage wagons, etc. (BB 12-24-1904, p. 22) [BW, VII, 5, pp. 17-19; II, 2, pp. 5-6; II, 3, p. 3; XIII, 6, p. 20.]
- Sautelle-Welsh  
Bandwagon and steam calliope (BB 6-3-1905, p. 17)
- 1906 Carl Hagenbeck  
Two tableaux (Elephant and India)  
[BW, II, 5, p. 6; XIII, 6, p. 24]
- Sells-Floto  
Elephant bandwagon<sup>4</sup>, Hippo tableau, five cages<sup>5</sup> including Queen<sup>3</sup> and Wrestler<sup>3</sup> (BB 12-23-1905, p. 16) [BW, I, 5, p. 9; I, 4, p. 9; XIX, 6, p. 3]
- 1908 Coney Island Hippodrome Co.  
Steam calliope (New York Clipper, 5-30-1908, p. 398)
- c.1908 Barnum & Bailey?  
1-3-1903, p. 4) [BW, XIII, 6, p. 22]  
Clown & Horn steam calliope—probably purchased used, possibly the preceeding CIH item. [BW, XIII, 6, p. 20]
- c.1910 Al G. Barnes?  
Mirror bandwagon, No. 37 later No. 185—has peculiar Bode brake [BW, III, 4, pp. 3-4]
- c.1910 Ferari Carnival  
Bandwagon (later on Washburn and Johnny J. Jones carnivals), steam calliope [photos taken at Norwich, New York before 1911, Norwich Public Library]
- c.1911 Sells Floto  
Ticket wagon
- c.1915 John Robinson?  
Steam calliope<sup>7</sup> [BW, VII, 5, p. 19; III, 1, pp. 10-11; XIII, 6, p. 24]
- 1916 Hagenbeck-Wallace  
Harp & Jesters  
air calliope<sup>4</sup> [BW, IX, 6, pp. 9-10]
- Sparks  
Dancing Girls tableau<sup>2</sup> [BW, V, 1, p. 9]
- c.1916 Sparks  
Steam calliope, ticket wagon and probably cage(s) (BB, 5-6-1916, p. 22) [BW, XIII, 6, p. 20]
- 1917 Frank Spellman, U.S. Motorized Circus  
Sixteen truck tableau bodies (Africa, Asia, Belgium, China, France<sup>1</sup>, Germany, Great Britain, India, Japan, Mexico, Panama, Persia, Russia, South America, United States,<sup>1</sup> unknown) Cornelia and Her Jewels carving<sup>2</sup> and Sparks cage lion<sup>2</sup> visible in early 1917 Bode shop views [BW, VI, 1, pp. 3-9; VI, 4, pp. 5-6; VIII, 5, pp. 14-15.]
- c.1919 Hagenbeck-Wallace  
Steam calliope<sup>5</sup> [BW, II, 5, p. 6; XIII, 6, p. 20]
- 1922 Al G. Barnes  
Bode sold Barnes \$6000 of carvings for \$1800 (BB, 2-11-1922, p. 68) Barnes personnel used carvings to decorate five wagons; Cornelia and Her Jewels tableau No. 180<sup>2</sup>, Elephant tableau No. 181<sup>3</sup>, Trees & Scenes tableau No. 182<sup>2</sup>, air calliope, steam calliope (body on old calliope chassis) [BW, I, 5, p. 5; III, 1, pp. 3-4; IV, 2, p. 20; III, 2, pp. 5-6; XIII, 6, pp. 19-20] Note: airwork for Spellman Africa same as painted cover panels on four section Barnes cage No. 29, c.1914.
- 1923 Sparks  
Four cages, three having corner carvings, baggage wagons
- 1928 Bode declines to build chariots for Sells-Floto (letter from Albert Bode, Jr. to Zack Terrell, 2-14-1928, Fred D. Pfening, Jr. Collection) Bode offers carvings for \$2700 to Charles Sparks (letter from Alice Bode to Charles Sparks, dated 1928, Circus World Museum).

Bode left no doubt this den was for snakes when he manufactured this wagon for the Hagenbeck show in 1905. Snake carvings appear on the sunbursts, mud-

board, skyboards, and above the glass. This wagon is much less ornate than a snake den built two years before for Ringling. Albert Conover Collection.

Another fine example of Bode craftsmanship is the band chariot built for the Carl Hagenbeck show in 1905. Pfening Archives.



WANTED  
ANYTHING PERTAINING TO THE FRED  
BUCHANAN CIRCUSES OF GRANGER,  
IOWA

YANKEE ROBINSON 1906-1920  
WORLD BROS. 1923  
ROBBINS BROS. 1924-1931

I will pay \$50.00 to locate and use photo of  
Circus train parked on siding at the  
Granger quarters

ALL LETTERS ANSWERED

MERRY CHRISTMAS &  
HAPPY NEW YEAR

JOSEPH S. RETTINGER  
P.O. Box 20371 Phoenix, Arizona 85036

TO ALL MY FRIENDS  
EVERYWHERE —  
Wishing You the Very Best  
For the Holiday Season



John W. Lewis  
P.O. Box 331302  
Miami, Fla. 33133



*Season's  
Greetings*

FROM

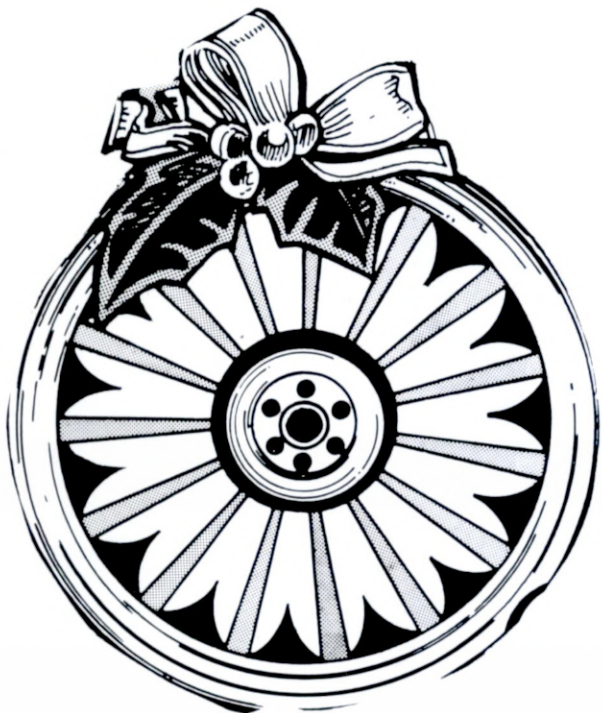
**RINGLING MUSEUM OF THE CIRCUS**

OF THE

JOHN AND MABLE RINGLING MUSEUM OF ART

IN

SARASOTA, FLORIDA



*Merry  
Christmas*

AND A

HAPPY NEW YEAR

*John R. Truss, Jr.*

1801 KANSAS ST.

MONAHANS, TX. 79756

# Season's Greetings



from the Staff  
of

**CIRCUS  
WORLD**  
MUSEUM  
BARABOO, WISCONSIN

# The Fred Buchanan Railroad Circuses 1923-31 Robbins Bros. Circus

## Part VII — The 1929 Season

by Joseph T. Bradbury

Several major news stories breaking near the end of the old year and soon after 1929 appeared on the scene let the circus world know that the coming season would be one of historic proportions. In the late fall of 1928 the American Circus Corporation purchased the 20 car Sparks Circus from Charlie Sparks and then in the first days of January 1929 bought the 30 car Al G. Barnes Circus from Al G. himself. With these acquisition the American Circus Corporation (Jerry Mugivan, Bert Bowers, Edward Ballard) would now field five railroad shows during the coming season, some 135 cars of circus. John Ringling was scheduled to receive the rest of his order for new stocks and flats from the Warren Tank Car Co. so the Ringling-Barnum Circus would travel on 90 of the new and longer cars.

Fred Buchanan's Robbins Bros. was at it's usual Granger, Iowa quarters and planned to go out again on 30 cars which was as many as any individual show on the road used with exception of Ringling-Barnum.

The initial news concerning Robbins came in a report in the Jan. 5, 1929 *Billboard* which said that Bessie Gunn, who was injured while performing her iron jaw act on the show in Elgin, Ill., July 9, 1928, was still in the hospital in that city. She had been well remembered during the recent Yule season by friends and fellow Robbins Bros. troupers. Among the visitors to the hospital was Clint Beery, president of CFA.

The Jan. 12, 1929 *Billboard* noted that the Yuletide holidays at the Granger quarters were gala occasions for the Robbins personnel. Steward Judd Muckle had the Robbins Hotel dining room very appropriately decorated and the 40 members of the winter crew were served a fine menu. W. E. Sinnott and Joe Bullington have been busy the past month installing new machinery in the blacksmith and woodworking shops. Joe Lloyd, boss hostler and Ralph Noble, supt. of canvas, were visitors and outlined preliminary work in their departments to start at an early date. C. W. Buchanan, manager of privileges and concessions, spent the past week at work moving back and forth between Des Moines and the Granger quarters.

A week later the *Billboard* said that with every department at the quarters full handed the work of rebuilding for

1929 has been proceeding satisfactorily. Two cars of choice Arkansas hardwood has been stored away for Joe Bullington's crew and details arranged for the building of some new wagons and cages. A final item said that Ralph G. Lockett who had been with John Robinson in 1928 as agent on the advertising car had been signed by Robbins Bros. as a press representative and would travel ahead of the show.

The Jan. 26, 1929 *Billboard* said that the extreme cold wave of the past week or ten days has not retarded progress in the Granger shops and the parade wagons and floats with their carvings are leaving the blacksmith, woodworking, and paint shops resplendent in new glory. Joe Bullington is in charge of the woodworking task with Sam Willis on the carvings, and Bill Vance handling the painting. John (Dutch) Schultz has been busy enlarging the camel barn and corral as the original quarters were too small to accommodate the 16 camels now carried with the show.

A report coming the first of February said that Manny Gunn who had been with Robbins the past two seasons as contracting agent would be

with Sells-Floto in 1929 in the same capacity.

The Feb. 9, 1929 *Billboard* had an interesting story that said the outstanding success attained by the automobile exhibition carried on Robbins Bros. in 1928 gave rise to speculation that several medium size shows would have similar auto tie-ins during the coming season. The story said it had been reported that Robbins Bros. received \$50,000 in 1928 for the automobile show it featured. It was also said that the auto manufacturers and dealers were highly pleased with the success of the Robbins exhibit.

The Feb. 23, 1929 *Billboard* carried this highly important article.

"GRANGER, IA. Feb. 16—Zero weather, high snow banks and plenty of snowstorms have proved quite a handicap for Superintendent Sinnott to overcome in keeping all departments at quarters busy. All work, notwithstanding the elements, has been progressing very nicely, and half of the big parade wagons have been finished.

"Miss Iowa, hippo, christened by Governor Hammill, has outgrown a cage in a year, and this spring will be domiciled in a fine new den, which has been conceded by visiting showmen to be the largest hipp den ever carried with a circus. A new wagon for the steam calliope is commanding the attention of the wagon shop right now, while Ralph Noble is busy building all new "blues."

"Joe Loyd, supt. of baggage stock,

Photo No.2—Robbins Bros. on the lot, season of 1929. In center is the former Barnum & Bailey Cinderella float and at left is portion of the Santa Claus wagon. In right background is the South America tableau. Circus World Museum (Baraboo, Wis.) Photo.



spent several days at the farm overseeing the return of the horses from pasture, and organizing the work of conditioning them for the summer season. Milt Robbins was a visitor Monday, returning to Illinois that evening, where he has en tour Milt's Big Fun Shows. John Schiller, auditor, has been confined to bed with an attack of rheumatism, but at this writing is much improved."

The new hippo den being constructed in the quarter's shops was the long, bay windowed, cage which is currently at the Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wis. It was used for two seasons to transport, Miss Iowa, the Robbins Bros. hippo, 1929 and 1930.

The new steam calliope wagon was of course the former Barnum & Bailey steamer commonly called for identification purposes, the Clown and Horn. Although Buchanan had purchased the Clown and Horn at Bridgeport back in 1927 he first put it into use on Robbins Bros. in 1929 and it remained on the show on through the 1930 and 1931 seasons. The old Forepaugh Lion chariot which had housed the Robbins steam calliope for the 1924 thru 1928 seasons was parked on the grounds of the Granger quarters and was photographed as late as 1936 in a derelict condition. What disposition was made of the instrument is not known to the author. It is assumed Buchanan purchased the Barnum & Bailey Clown and Horn steamer with the instrument intact. If so, then he would have had two steam calliope instruments.

The March 2, 1929 *Billboard* gave the first indication of acts which were to appear in the coming season performance of Robbins Bros. The article mentioned that Erma Ward, aerialist, had been signed. Last season she was one of the features on Sells-Floto. Other highlights in the 1929 Robbins program will be Joe Hodgini's comedy riding act, the famous Kanazawa Japs, the Destey Family from Europe, and the Three Hugonys. The same issue had a report from the Granger quarters which stated that Dutch Schultz's animal barn attracted much attention recently when word came from there that a llama had been born. C.W. Buchanan was in quarters on business and general agent, P.N. Branson, spent several days in conference with owner, Fred Buchanan. Paul Barton, trainmaster, is now in Des Moines and will remain there until weather permits him and his crew to work on the Robbins train. Will T. Buchanan, general press representative, has established his quarters in Des Moines and is busy perfecting his advance press organization and editing an entirely new line of advertising and publicity material.

**ROBBINS BROS. CIRCUS**  
PRESENTS  
**BUCK JONES**  
FAMOUS-WESTERN-SCREEN-STAR  
**GREENVILLE, Wednesday, OCT. 9th**

Photo No. 1—Newspaper ad for Greenville, Texas, Oct. 9, 1929. This cut was used all season and after Buck Jones joined at Fremont, Neb. on July 24 the top portion "Robbins Bros. Circus presents Buck Jones, Famous Western Screen Star" was added. Pfening Archives.

The March 9, 1929 *Billboard* advised that Ralph Noble has finished building the general admission seats at Granger and was enlarging the entire seating capacity. The grandstand will be next in line for Noble's crew. Ted Kruze has been busy on the poles as it has been decided to raise the big top higher during the coming season. Joe Bullington has another cage almost ready for the painters. Bill Willis will return as chief electrician and will soon leave for the East to bring back two new light plants. Dutch Schultz has been signed to

again have the elephants and menagerie. Other staffers recently named were Tex Montgomery, ring stock, and Fred Shafer, wardrobe. A.H. Bailey has been named to head the wild west concert and Cheyenne Seiber will again be featured in the after show. Bert Rickman, equestrian director, has returned to quarters from an extended Eastern trip and is busily engaged setting the final arrangements and details for the big show program and his new spec.

In mid-March, Lionel Wasson, manager of the Des Moines Theater made arrangements with Fred Buchanan to bring Robbins Bros. tents, wagons, freaks, and other sideshow paraphernalia from the Granger quarters to Des Moines for use outside the theater and in the lobby and foyer during a weeks presentation of the First National movie, *The Barker*.

The March 23, 1929 *Billboard* said that with improved weather conditions at Granger during the past week work in quarters has been speeded up considerably. All the parade tableaux, cages and menagerie dens have been finished. It was also officially announced that J.E. (Doc) Ogden who had managed the sideshow in 1928 will not troupe during the coming season on account of his wife's health and that Milt Robbins would head up the sideshow. Robbins of course had managed the sidewho for Buchanan several seasons. F. Robert Saul had signed on as press representative, making his sixth season with Buchanan. It was announced that the show would open at Perry, Iowa on April 27.

The Robbins Bros. 1929 train consisted of 30 cars and in all probability had the same number and type as the previous season which was 1 advance, 7 stocks, 15 flats, and 7 coaches. (Color scheme and other details of the train will come in Joe Fleming's report printed later)

The show again carried ten elephants and Change Reynolds believes they were the same as on the show in 1928, Columbia, Ena, Trilby, Big Katie, Big Jennie, Margaret, Blanche, Tony, Vera (Big Bingo), and Little Babe.

It can be assumed the show's lead stock and caged animals were about the same as the year before. No exact count on the number of cage wagons has turned up but it was around a dozen.

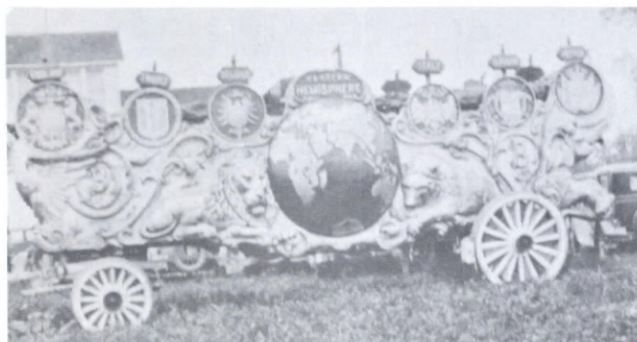
Although the opening review mentioned that the show had new canvas and no doubt many of the tents were put into use for the first time at the initial stand it is believed the big top was probably the same that had been on the show at the conclusion of the 1928 season, a 140 ft. round, with three 50 ft. middles, made of khaki colored canvas.

vas. It will be noted later that the show put up a new big top in mid-season.

The 1929 street parade was again a great feature of Buchanan's Robbins Bros. Circus. Wagons in the line of march included the Spellman set, Belgium, United States, Great Britain, France, Africa (often called India or Hippo), China, Panama, and South America, also the former Yankee Robinson air calliope, and two great ex-Barnum & Bailey wagons which once moved in the street processions of that famous show, the Two Hemispheres wagon, and the Clown and Horn steam calliope. Also present were the four pony floats that Buchanan had acquired in 1927, Cinderella, Santa Claus, Old Woman in Shoe, and Mother Goose. Photos show the huge former Barnum & Bailey hippo den now carrying hay eating animals was in the 1929 parade. Belgium, as usual, was the No. 1 bandwagon while the No. 2 band was on the United States. The Two Hemispheres wagon was again placed in the middle of the parade with Indians in native dress atop.

The reader is asked to specifically examine the tableau-cage den loaded on a Robbins Bros. flat car as shown in photo no. 13. This is the only known photo in existence of this wagon on Robbins Bros. and as mentioned in the last installment the late Dick Conover and the author once speculated that the wagon could have come to Buchanan either from Bridgeport or Baraboo depending on when and where it was last on the road with a Ringling owned show. CHS Fred Dahlinger Jr. has finally located a photo of the wagon when it was obviously on Forepaugh-Sells. The wagon appears in a photo opposite page 224 of Thompson's book, *On the Road With a Circus*, printed in 1903. This photo pictures the wagon in its original form with Indian rider and buffalo carvings intact. Dahlinger has also spotted this tab-den in the famous Sells Bros. outdoor menagerie photo of the 1880's that was printed in the

**Photo No. 4—Two Hemispheres wagon on the Robbins Bros. lot at Jefferson, Wis., July 14, 1929. Photo by Clarence Kachel (Joe Bradbury Collection)**



**Photo No. 3—Robbins Bros. steam calliope pulled by a Mack truck brings up the rear of the street parade in Beloit, Wis., May 17, 1929. The former Barnum & Bailey Clown and Horn Steam Calliope was first used by Robbins Bros. in 1929. Photo by Charles Kitto.**

Jan.-Feb. 1964 *Bandwagon* as well as the 1900 Forepaugh-Sells menagerie photo in the July-Aug. 1967 *White Tops*. By the time the wagon got to Robbins the lower sideboard and the upper half of the Indian carving on the side were gone. Dahlinger has another view of this tab-den in an open air menagerie in the 1910's which could either be Barnum & Bailey or Ringling Bros. He rightly concludes the wagon by one show or the other went to Baraboo or Bridgeport and then to Robbins. Hopefully, in time the complete details on this tab-den will be known. It is assumed Buchanan used it in the Robbins street parades although there are no photos to prove this was the case.

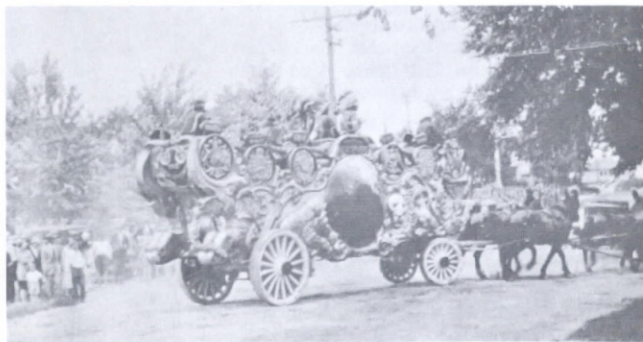
As spring arrived it was now time for the circus season to begin, one which virtually all showmen expected would be another fine one. The late 20's had been good to most circuses and outdoor show business in general. The nation's economy was good, the stock market booming, and as yet no experts had predicted the coming

financial disaster which would hit in late October. The Republicans had won the White House for the third consecutive time and their man, Herbert Hoover, had been sworn in as the president to succeed Coolidge a few weeks ago.

Railroad circuses, flat car type, going out for the 1929 season included Ringling-Barnum, 90 cars; Sells-Floto, 30 cars; Hagenbeck-Wallace, 30 cars; Al G. Barnes, 30 cars; Robbins Bros., 30 cars; John Robinson, 25 cars; Sparks, 20 cars; Christy Bros., 20 cars; Gentry Bros., 15 cars; and Cole Bros., 10 cars. Also there was E.H. Jones' Cole and Rogers show on 3 cars, gilly type. Two railroad, flat car type, wild west shows were going out, Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West on 30 cars, and a newcomer, Buck Jones Wild West on 15 cars.

Overland circuses hitting the road were Downie Bros., Mighty Haag, Schell Bros., Barnett Bros., Seils-Sterling, Charles T. Hunt, Russell Bros., Silvan-Drew, E.E. Coleman, Vanderburg Bros., Honest Bill-Moon Bros., M.L. Clark, Orton Bros., Ketrow Bros., Dorsey Bros., Conroy

**Photo No. 5—Two Hemispheres wagon in Robbins Bros. parade, Jefferson, Wis., July 14, 1929. Note American Indians atop. Photo by Clarence Kachel. (Joe Bradbury Collection)**



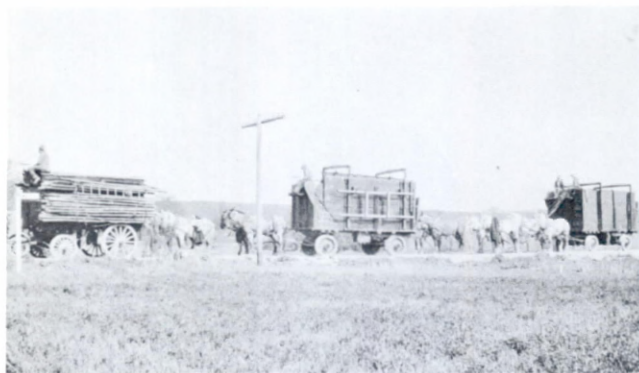


Photo No. 6—Three baggage wagons with teams on Robbins Bros. lot, Jefferson, Wis., July 14, 1929. Photo by Clarence Kachel. (Joe Bradbury Collection)

Bros., Drake Bros., Rose Killian, Mack Hale, Richard Bros., Cook Bros., Robinson Bros., and Camel Bros. Most of the overland shows were now fully motorized although a number still moved with a combination of trucks and horse drawn wagons.

Railroad show parading included Sparks, Robbins Bros., Christy Bros., Gentry Bros., Cole Bros., Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West, Buck Jones Wild West, and even the 3 car Cole & Rogers put on the daily march. Most of the larger overland circuses also presented a daily parade. An interesting development was that even though no American Circus Corporation owned show had paraded since 1925 the owners felt the street parade was such a featured part of circus day on their newly acquired Sparks Circus it was retained throughout the 1929 season.

Robbins Bros. opened the 1929 season on April 27 at Perry, Iowa. The May 4, 1929 *Billboard* said a big matinee crowd and fair night house saw the initial performances in a heavy rainstorm. The article noted the outfit has new tents and equipment and presented a fine street parade. The spec, Mother Goose in Fairyland, Joe Hodgini's troupe of riders, Ruth Millette, aerialiste, Al Hassenue's Arabs, Kanazawa troupe of Japs, Merkel Bros., and Kenneth Waite troupe of clowns are featured.

The full Robbins Bros. review came the next week in the May 4, 1929 *Billboard*. It read as follows:

"ROBBINS BROS. SHOW PROGRAM AND STAFF. The program of the Robbins Bros. Circus, which opened the season at Perry, Ia., April 27, begins with Equestrian Director Bert Rickman's new spec, Mother Goose in Fairyland. The musical numbers were written and arranged by O.A. Gilson, the show's band director. The dancing ballet was drilled by Mrs. Rickman.

"Among the interesting and novel features offered is the European sensation, the Merkle brothers and sister, Alfred, Paul, and Lulu, who recently arrived from Germany. They have a startling 'human fly' act in which the brothers walk upside down on top of the tent, while the sister appears in a whirling trap act. Ruth Millette appears in a thrilling trapeze act in which she makes cloud swings, and finally a double catch by her heels. The Kanazawa troupe of 10 Japanese performs many clever stunts, including balancing, wire walking, juggling and a slide for life. The Al Hassenue troupe of 10 Arabs does many gymnastic, acrobatic and tumbling acts. The Aerila Wonders, five in number, a French importation, do a sensational trapeze act. One of the biggest hits is the comedy riding act of the Joe Hodgini family of five. The Robbins elephants under the direction of Capt. John Schultz, assisted by Lillian Burslem and Marion Garland, perform good stunts. A group of highly trained high-school horses, 16 in number, with their lady riders, is one of the features. Kate and Tom Smith's high-jumping Russian wolfhounds, monkeys, ponies and dogs are among the best trained in the business. Kenneth R. Waite, produc-

Photo No. 8—Robbins Bros. used this litho in 1929 to advertise its large elephant, Big Bingo (Vera). Title was in red with lettering at the top in green and blue. Background was orange-yellow with the elephant in it's natural colors. Kent Ghirard Collection.

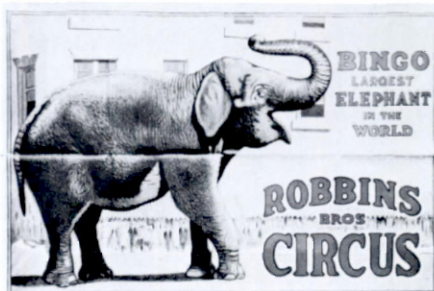


Photo No. 7—Robbins Bros. new hippo den on the lot at McCook, Neb., Aug. 6, 1929. This huge bay window type den was built at the Granger Quarters and first used in 1929 to house the show's hippo, Miss Iowa. Photo by Joe Fleming.

ing clown, and his joeys offer some good numbers. The Bucking Ford Smiths, three people are very good with their novel bucking Ford machine. The show closes with Fred Buchanan's historical pageant, Historic America. The work of Gilson's concert band marks that organization as one of the best of circus bands.

"The show staff and personnel: Owner and general manager, Fred Buchanan; legal adjuster, James Morse; musical director, O.A. Gilson; auditor, John Schiller; manager side show, Milton Robbins; treasurer, Charles Meyers; supt. of privileges, Lonnie Buchanan; secretary, Les G. Minger; equestrian director, Bert Rickman; press representative back, F. Robert Saul; director of publicity, Will T. Buchanan; supt. of Wild West department, Tom McKinney; story man ahead, Bob Buchanan; supt. of wardrobe, Fred Schaffer, general agent, P.M. Branson; first asst. wardrobe, Bernard Rose; local contractors, Dan Hoffman and J. Russell Hervey; brigade agent, E.C. Reid; manager of pit show, Fred Poole; manager of advertising car No. 1, Frank Sterns (has 22 billposters, lithographers and bannermen); producing clown, Kenneth R. Waite; general supt., Earl Sinnott; supt. of canvas, Ralph Nobel; first asst. boss canvasman, Whitie Ross; supt. of menagerie, John (Dutch) Schultz; first menagerie asst., Francis Hogan; boss props, S. Steinhauer; boss hostler, Joe Lloyd; trainmaster, Paul Barton; supt. of stake and chain, Jack King; supt. of ring stock, Charles Schaffer; supt. of auto canvas, J.A. Casey; steam calliope player, L. Ray Choisser; Indian agent, Clarence Cordry; steward, H.L. Kelly.

"Men's dressing room (performers), Bert Rickman, Tom McKinney, Joe Hodgini, Kenneth R. Waite, Chester Sherman, Orin E. Dops, Charles

Robinson, Harold Hall, John Delmar, Ray Hays, Robert Gow, Pat Kling, Thomas Morris, Billy Cummins, Gene Lewis, Gene Tartar, Rube Jack Dyer, Merle Roper, Roy Smith, Jack Smith, Jerry Martindale, Willie Bryant, Howard Bryant, Dr. Richeson, Blondie Ward, Carl Strong, Alfred and Paul Merkle, Al Bailey, Billy West, Walter Laedeke, Al Hess, Fred Sweet, George, Jimmie, Francis, Kami and Mannie Kanazawa, T. Torigoe, I. Terami, Nick Gallucci and Gus Hansen. (Note this roster covered clowns, riders, all personnel connected with the performance).

"Ladies dressing room, Mary Rickman, Helen Morse, Etta Hodgini, Victoria Coyle, Minnie Atzen, Mildred Terami, Ruby Bailey, Dolly Jacobs, Mildred Owen, Dorothy Hansen, Illian Burslem, Marion Garland, Ruth Millette, Vivian McKinney, Georgia Jones, Billy Bedonie, Erma Lee and Alta May Niquette, Mazie Floto, Alpha Von Heiberg, Elsie Ward, Rose Lee Clark, Jewel Jackson, Helen Johnson, Dora Choisser, Hazel Hickey, Mary Wood, Peggy Goodyear, and Leola Weston.

"Side show attractions; Manager, Milton Robbins; Tommy Arenz, inside lecturer, Punch, ventriloquist and magic; Joe Riggers' band and minstrels of 14 people; Cuban Mack, sword swallower and impalement act; Charles Grey, tattooed man; Eva Mack, snakes; Princess Marie Gallucci, midget; H.H. Parks, giant; Marie Willis, Albino; Three Camerons, Scotch musicians; Chief Roscoe's Hawaiians; Maxine Robbins, musical act; Mildred Mae Robbins, mentalist, and Cuppie Sinnott, mindreader and crystal gazer.

"The singing and solo work of Minnie Atzen, Nick Gallucci and Charles Robinson in the spec, and the solo dancing of the Niquette Sisters and Sam Washington and quartet work of the minstrel boys, were features of the spec.

"Fred (Peggy) Poole has a money-getting pit show with many attractive banners under the management of Bob Williams. One of the features of the midway is the fine lunch stand of Earl Sinnott under the management of Jack Burslem.

"The Wild West show is given under the direction of Tom McKinney, assisted by Al Bailey, Ruby Bailey and Blondie are featured in trick and fancy bronk riding while Carl Strong and Pauline Halfley are prominent among the bronco busters and ropers.

"Big show band, director, O.A. Gilson (and 20 additional bandsmen listed).

"Candy stands; Supt. of privileges, Lonnie Buchanan (and 13 butchers listed) F. ROBERT SAUL."

It will be noted that Erma Ward was not listed among the performers

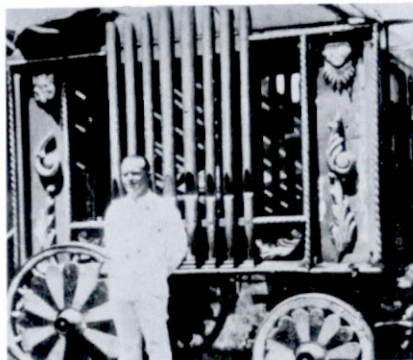


Photo No. 10—Robbins Bros. litho advertising Buck Jones Famous Western Screen Star in Person, season of 1929. This show used these after Jones joined the show at Fremont, Neb., July 24. Color scheme has white lettering on red with a photographic print of Buck Jones in the center. Pfening Archives.

although it had been reported earlier she had been signed as an aerialist. Evidently, the report was false, or for some reason Erma Ward did not appear. Probably Ruth Millette took over the trapeze act Erma Ward was to perform.

The second stand of the season, Newton, Iowa, April 29, was played to good business despite cold weather. A heavy rainstorm was encountered at night at Iowa City, Ia., the third date,

Photo No. 9—Robbins Bros. air calliope (former Yankee Robinson) on the lot, season of 1929. Standing in front is Glen Johnson, the air calliope player. Pfening Archives.



which kept many away, however business in the afternoon was good. Kenneth Waite put on a new clown number at Iowa City titled, Americans on Parade in London. The final Iowa stand came at Cedar Rapids, May 1, where very good business was done, then the show moved into Illinois at Rock Island under sponsorship of the American Legion. Set up was at the athletic park, the only available showgrounds in Rock Island.

Two additional Illinois dates followed, Kewanee, and Kankakee, May 4, where Robbins made it's first appearance in that city and drew large crowds at the ticket wagons. Will T. and Bob Buchanan dropped back to the show at Kankakee for a conference with the boss, Fred.

The May 18, 1929 *Billboard* said that Buchanan, thru his boss hostler, Joe Lloyd, had purchased from Joe Greer his famous high and broad-jumping horse, "King Cole" which is being ridden in the performance by Jewell Jackson. The article said that one of the big hits of the show is the trick riding of Ruby and Al Bailey and Blondie Ward. Charles Robinson, Chester Sherman, John Delmar and Orin Dops are scoring with their clown numbers. Other performance notes said that the European act, the Human Fly, featuring Alfred, Paul and Lulu Merkle of Germany, who walk on the ceiling of a big platform erected in the dome of the tent, and the novelty turn of Lulu Merkle on the Roman rings are going over big, as are Ruth Millette on the trapeze and the Joe Hodgini Family of bare-back riders. A final item said that Ralph Nobel, boss canvasman, general supt. Earl Sinnott, boss hostler Joe Lloyd, and trainmaster Paul Barton have been doing some fine work in getting the show on and off the lots.

Elsewhere in the same *Billboard* issue there was a report that Robbins Bros. would have major opposition with the John Robinson Circus at Elgin, Ill. Robbins was booked for May 13 while John Robinson was coming June 17. The brigade of the John Robinson show had already come in billing in opposition to Robbins and locals said it was the first time in years that circus opposition posters have been put up in Elgin.

In addition to the favorable reports the trade publications were giving the 1929 edition of Robbins Bros., the April 1929 issue of *The White Tops* made it's appearance and a major article said that Robbins Bros. had gotten away to a fine start and have a bigger and better performance this season. CFA members J.A. Wagner and Col. Park Findly of Des Moines and Louis Latta and family caught the show at Newton, Iowa, April 29. Their report said the parade is a knockout and the Merkle Bros. and Lulu from

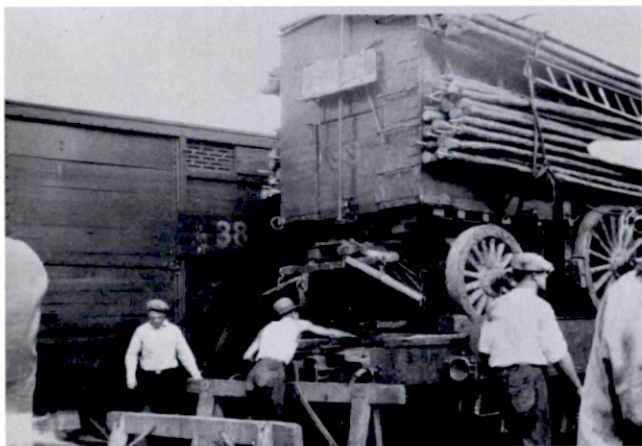


Photo No. 11—Preparing runs for unloading the Robbins Bros. train in Newton, Kan., Aug. 1, 1928. See Epilog for the story of this outstanding set of photos, nos. 11-31. Photo by Arthur Toeves. (Joe Fleming Collection)

Germany are a sensation in their Human Fly upside down act. Ruth Millette, aerialist, in heel catches scores. Miss Iowa, the hippo, is in her third den, so large does she grow. A herd of 10 elephants with "Bingo" much larger than last season, a fine herd of camels, and other animals make a fine menagerie. The Jap act is a wow and Joe Hodgini's riding, O.A. Gilson's band, the reserve seat grandstand, and the excellent stock make a fine showing with this year's Robbins Bros.

The show moved over into Indiana, May 6, at Elkhart, played Auburn the next day, then went into Michigan for Adrian, Jackson, and Kalamazoo, before returning to Indiana for a single date at Michigan City, May 11. Following a Sunday run the show returned to Illinois for Elgin, May 13, then moved into Wisconsin for four stands. Kenosha, Racine, Waukesha, and Beloit. Following the traditional Buchanan pattern of routing by moving back and forth between states after short stays the show returned to Illinois to play Rockford, May 18, then it was back into the home state of Iowa with stands booked for Muscatine, Ottumwa, Charitan, and Creston.

The June 1, 1929 *Billboard* covered the Robbins route through this area and said that the show had very good business at Elgin, Ill., Kenosha, Waukesha, and Beloit, Wos. as well as Rockford, Ill. At Racine, May 15, the article said that in the evening there was a storm which blew down the menagerie tent and upset two cages of animals. Paul Monroe, a menagerie attache, was pinned underneath one and was taken to St. Mary's Hospital, where it was found that he suffered only minor bruises. A real hit is the Royal Morrish Troupe which joined at

Elkhart, Indiana and are doing fine head-to-head and hand-to-hand stands and double somersaults. Also Bert Richman's new spec with the expanded title, "Mother Goose and Santa Claus in Fairyland" is going over big. Some nice work is being done in the spec by Chester Sherman, Minnie Atzen, Alta May, Erma Nee Niquette and Mazie Floto. Another story in the same issue said that Helen Johnson, a trapeze performer with Robbins Bros. was injured while practicing on the aerial bar. She fell only a short distance but fractured three bones in her right foot. After being treated in a hospital she was able to join the show but will be out of the program for several weeks. The location of the stand where they injury occurred was not identified.

We have received a most interesting letter from Warren W. Langlis who was in Racine, Wis. the day Robbins played there, May 15, 1929, which reads as follows:

"Perhaps this incident which happened on Robbins Bros. date in Racine, Wis. in 1929 might be of interest. This material was taken from newspaper items in the *Racine Journal News* at that time.

"The show played Racine on May 15, 1929. It came from Kenosha on the Milwaukee R.R. The show had a street parade at noon down the main streets of Racine and there were many visitors in town for the parade.

"About 5 p.m. it started raining and the management decided at 6 to cancel the night show for fear of a blowdown. At 6:30 p.m. the menagerie top did blow down. In moving the show back to the runs it was necessary to move a heavy wagon across a small stream on the lot and the wagon mired down. They attached a 20 horse hitch and had men pushing on the wagon in an attempt to move it. The wagon fell over on a 18 year old Pennsylvania boy breaking his back. When he was released from under the wagon he was rushed to the hospital in an executives car where he was not expected to live.

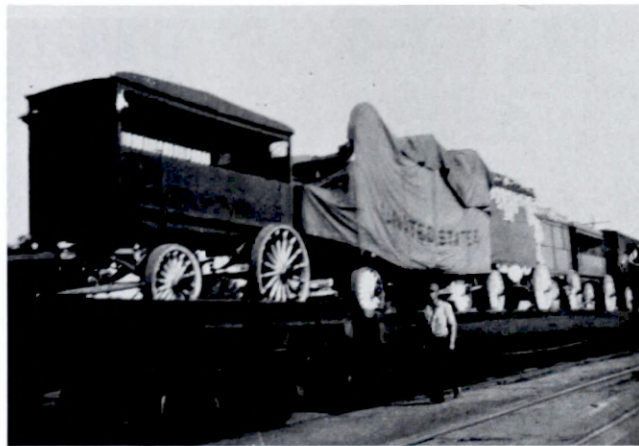


Photo No. 12—Robbins Bros. loaded flats, Newton, Kan., Aug. 1, 1928. Note former Sells Bros., Forepaugh-Sells tableau-den, third wagon from left. Photo by Arthur Toeves (Joe Fleming Collectin)

"The show was finally loaded and moved on to Waukesha at 7 a.m. the next morning. Circus officials stated they have run into nothing but rain and mud since leaving winterquarters but this was the first time they cancelled a show because of the weather.

"Although I was only 8 years old I remember this one. My father was somewhat of a circus fan and we lived only two blocks from the runs. He always got me up at 3 or 4 in the morning to watch the shows come in. After watching them unload for a while we would go to the lot and stay until he had to go to work. We would always go to the night show.

"This particular night he had a lodge meeting but he insisted on going to the lot in the pouring rain. When he saw the conditions he decided to go back to the runs and see them load up instead of going to the meeting. We sat in the car, an Olds sedan, for about 2 or 3 hours watching."

It is interesting to speculate if there were two accidents to Robbins personnel on account of the storm at Racine, both injured by overturning wagons, or if in fact there was only one, the *Billboard* account saying there were only minor injuries, the local Racine newspaper terming them serious with the victim not expected to live.

Following the four stands in Iowa Robbins went over into Missouri for St. Joseph, May 24, then headed into Nebraska at Falls City the following day.

The June 8, 1929 *Billboard* said that the show had a big day in Mascatine, Ia., May 20. Bob Buchanan was on the show for a conference with his uncle, owner Fred Buchanan. Also Joe Fish joined as boss hostler replacing Joe Lloyd who was called home due to his mother's illness. (Lloyd went with

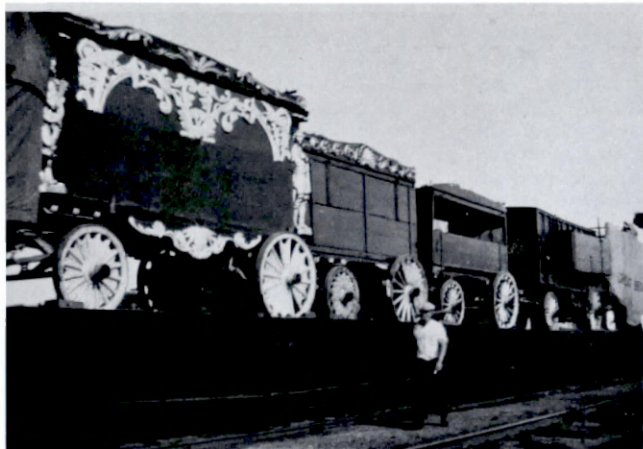


Photo No. 13—Robbins Bros. loaded flats, Newton, Kan., Aug. 1, 1928. Wagon at extreme left is the former Sells Bros., Forepaugh-Sells tab den Buchanan picked up at either the Bridgeport or Baraboo quarters. Photo by Arthur Toeves. (Joe Fleming Collection)

Christy Bros. several weeks later). There was a soft lot and two-mile haul at Ottumwa, Ia., May 21. A fair crowd was at the matinee with a capacity house at night. Two good sized crowds attended at Chariton, and Creston, the final stand during the current tour of Iowa, was one of the biggest days so far in the season. Many were seated on the ground at the matinee and there was a big night house. The show arrived late in St. Joseph, Mo. due to a rail accident. It happened four miles south of Barnard, Mo. when a journal broke on the engine and two wheels came off one of the flats. No one was hurt. The parade was given at 6:30 p.m. and the night performance started at 8:30. Business was big and the Press Gazette gave the show excellent mention.

After Falls City, Neb. the show moved to Omaha where following a Sunday off two performances were given on Monday, May 27. Then it was back into Iowa for Onawa, Cherokee, Iowa Falls, Waterloo, Charles City, Algona, and Mason City.

The June 15, 1929 *Billboard* said this was the first visit ever of Robbins to Omaha where there was a huge matinee followed by a turnaway at night. The Daily World-Herald and The Omaha Bee-News with the co-operation of Publicity Director, Will T. Buchanan and Robert Buchanan, story man ahead, put over much publicity. A big matinee crowd and a fair night house came in Onawa, Iowa while Cherokee, Ia. turned out in large numbers to welcome Fred Buchanan and his show. Two good crowds were in Iowa Falls where the parade went out on time in spite of a late arrival and long haul to the lot. Charles City, Ia., June 1, gave a good matinee crowd

but there was a small night house. Visitors noted that Milt Robbins has several fine features in his sideshow including Princess Marie Gallucci, midget; Capt. Will Kirk, giant; Cuban Mack, sword swallower and fire-eater, and Mack and his wife in an impalement act. Joe Riggers' Minstrels and band also score in the kid show.

Robbins moved into Minnesota at Fairbault, June 5, then played Albert Lea before returning to Iowa for Estherville which was followed by another jump into Minnesota for Worthington on June 8. A Sunday run then moved the train westward to South Dakota for a string of six stands with the first coming at Sioux Falls, Monday, June 10. Watertown, Huron, Aberdeen, Mobridge, and Lemmon, the latter a matinee only, followed.

Venturing further west than in recent seasons Robbins went into Montana for a short stay with stands at Baker, a matinee only, Miles City, and Glendive. Then the show headed eastward, moving into North Dakota at Dickinson, June 19.

The June 29, 1929 *Billboard* covered the Robbins route through South Dakota and said the show had a capacity matinee and big night house at Sioux Falls, June 10. The Daily Argus-Leader reported that Robbins Bros. had the finest street parade that

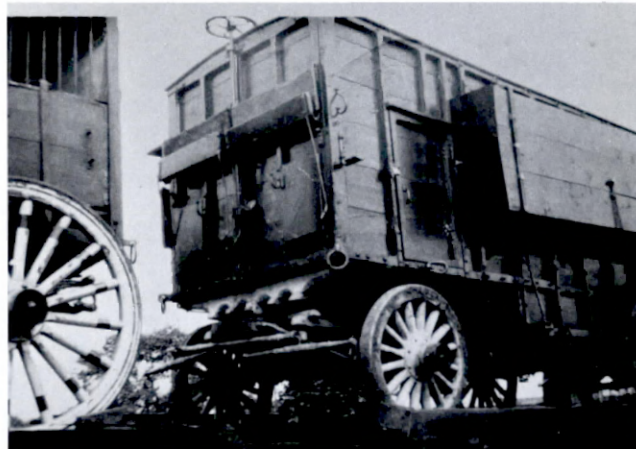


Photo No. 15—Robbins Bros. loaded flats, Newton, Kan., Aug. 1, 1928. Note obvious Ringling Bros. (or RBBB) construction of the baggage wagon in center which Buchanan obtained from Bridgeport or Baraboo. Photo by Arthur Toeves. (Joe Fleming Collection)

had ever visited Sioux Falls; that the outfit was all new, clean, attractive and the big show one of the most pleasing ever to visit that city. There were two good houses at Watertown and at Huron, a turnaway in the afternoon and capacity at night. Two big houses were also recorded at Aberdeen. Robbins was the first circus in Mobridge in several years and had a big matinee but small night house. Clarence Gordroy, the show's Indian agent from Mission, Mont., motored to Mobridge, bringing seven Sioux braves from the Rosebud Reservation near Valentine, Neb. Lemmon, S.D., June 15, was one of the biggest days of the season so far for the show. At Huron, S.D., June 12, Ruth Correia, a rider, joined Robbins and is now appearing with the Joe Hodgini family comedy riding act.

Other North Dakota dates played by

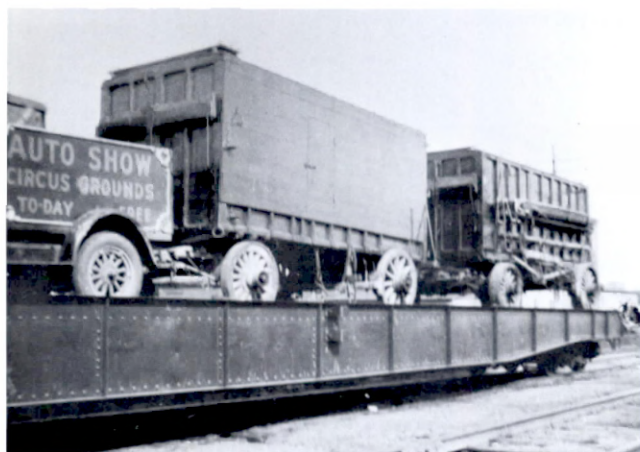
Photo No. 14—Robbins Bros. loaded flats, Newton, Kans., Aug. 1, 1928. Photo by Arthur Toeves (Joe Fleming Collection).



the show included Bismark, Jamestown, and Fargo, and then after a Sunday run Robbins went into Minnesota for stands at Detroit, Brainerd, and Duluth. On June 27 the show went into Wisconsin to play Superior then returned immediately to Minnesota at Princeton which was followed by St. Cloud. A Sunday run next took the Robbins train to Minneapolis for a two day stand, July 1-2. The show played St. Paul, July 3 then went again to Wisconsin for an Independence Day engagement at Menomonie. Again only a single stand was played in Wisconsin before Buchanan had his show back in Minnesota for two dates, Red Wing and Rochester. It was back into Iowa July 8 at Oelwein and Postville the next day.

For some three weeks absolutely nothing appeared in the trade publications concerning the Robbins route through Montana, North Dakota, and the early dates in Minnesota and Wisconsin. The July 20, 1929 *Billboard* finally broke the silence and said that the two-day engagement in Minneapolis and the one day in St. Paul, those cities new for Robbins Bros., were largely attended and the press staff landed a lot of space in the local dailies. The Minneapolis Journal on July 2, thru arrangement with Owner Fred Buchanan, entertained 3,500 orphan and crippled children. Business was big in Menomonie, Wis., and Red Wing and Rochester, Minn. While Robbins was at Duluth Cole Bros. was playing at Virginia, Minn. and several troupers from Cole caught the Robbins matinee in Duluth. These included Mrs. Floyd King, wife of the show's owner, Jack Walsh, steward, and Professor Windecker, inside man with the Cole annex. Visiting Robbins at Minneapolis was the Cole Bros. general agent, L.C. Gillette.

Photo No. 16—Robbins Bros loaded flats, Newton, Kan., Aug. 1, 1928. Note the two baggage wagons are obviously of Ringling Bros. (or RBBB) origin. Photo by Arthur Toeves. (Joe Fleming Collection)



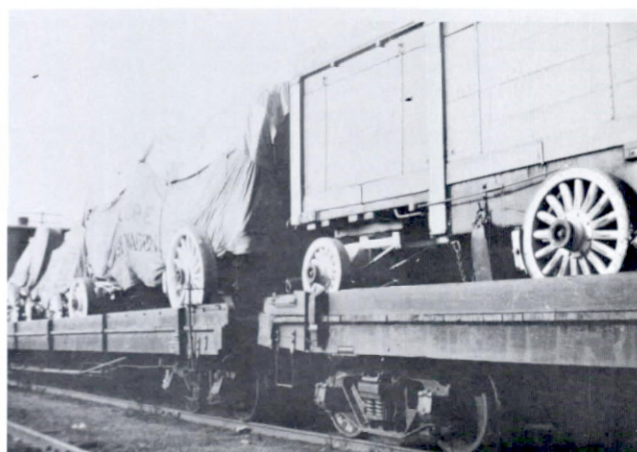
Robbins Bros. returned to Wisconsin, July 10, at Richland Center, then played Portage, Beaver Dam, Waukesha, Jefferson, Lancaster, and Dodgeville. (Note: If the 1929 Robbins Bros. route which came to the author from the late E.W. Adams is correct, the show evidently played Waukesha, Wis. twice during the season, May 16 and July 13.)

The show upon completion of its final Wisconsin date for the season went into Illinois at DeKalb, July 17, played Sterling the next day, then made another trip into Iowa for Maquoketa, Anamosa, Boone, and Missouri Valley. The route next took the Robbins train to Nebraska for dates at Fremont, Albion, O'Neill, and Valentine.

The July 1929 *White Tops* said that Robbins Bros. had received a number of splendid press notices this season for a fine show. The article advised that the show's advance had been having great success with an advertising tie-in with local newspapers along the route. A free circus ticket is given to a boy or girl who secures a new three months subscription to the paper. A final note said that CFA members Joe Taggart and John Sheppard had visited Robbins Bros. in Elgin, Ill. back on May 13 and reported people were turned away at night so great was the crowd wanting to see the show.

In July there was an important development elsewhere in the circus world which would favorably affect Robbins Bros. during the latter part of its season. The new Buck Jones Wild West Show folded July 12 at Danville, Ill. after a rocky season. The story of the Buck Jones show has been told in major articles in the *Bandwagon* in the following issues, Nov.-Dec. 1965; Mar.-Apr. 1972, and July-Aug. 1972. When the show closed a

Photo No. 17—Robbins Bros. loaded flats at Newton, Kan., Aug. 1, 1928. Cage at extreme right housed the hippo, Miss Iowa. This cage used through 1928 was replaced by the newly built bay-window



number of circuses made a pitch for the personal services of Buck Jones, including Jerry Mugivan of the American Circus Corporation, Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West, and Fred Buchanan, owner of Robbins Bros. Jones was a well known Hollywood movie cowboy at a time when their appearances with circuses or wild west shows was on a high plane of popularity. In addition to Jones being on the road with his own wild west show in 1929 other movie cowboys on the sawdust trail were Jack Hoxie with the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West Show and Tom Mix with Sells-Floto.

Buchanan was successful in bidding for Buck Jones' services and Buck with his two movie horses left Danville and joined Robbins Bros., at Fremont, Neb., July 24. The rest of the Jones equipment was shipped to the Hall Farm in Lancaster, Mo. A short time later 10 men and some wild west stock went out from the Hall Farm in an express car to join Buck on the Robbins show and arrived while it was still in Nebraska. The details of the financial arrangement between Buchanan and Buck Jones is not known to the author. Possibly Buchanan had to pay off some of Jones' loan from DeWitt Pilchard, who took over all the show's property not mortgaged to others. Buck Jones took his private rail car to Fremont and it was attached to the Robbins train. In all probability the men and wild west horses found room in the Robbins cars so that no additional rail cars were needed. With the Buck Jones private car there would now be a total of 31 cars in the Robbins Bros. train.

Newspaper ads now carried the title, "Robbins Bros. Circus and Buck Jones Wild West Combined." Some of the original Jones ads were also incorporated into the Robbins material.

type den (shown in photo No. 7) in 1929. The appearance of this cage on the flat car definitely dates this set as 1928. (See Epilog) Photo by Arthur Toeves. (Joe Fleming Collection)

The August 3, 1929 *Billboard* told the story of Buck Jones going to Robbins Bros. and the article said a long term contract was in effect but no additional details were given.

The show left Nebraska after its date in Valentine to make a Sunday run into South Dakota where on Monday, July 29, two performances were given in Rapid City. Then the route carried Robbins Bros. back into Nebraska for Chadron, Alliance, Scottsbluff, and Sidney. The Aug. 17, 1929 *Billboard* said the show played to capacity houses on August 2 at Sidney sporting a six day old big top. If this report is correct then the show must have put the new big top into use for the first time at Valentine, Neb. on July 27. The article didn't mention the size of the tent but in all probability it was the same as the previous big top, a 140 ft. round with three 50's. The story noted that Buck Jones was getting a kick out of his new engagement with Robbins Bros. Buck gives an intimate concert after the main show, corralling much applause. The peak in Buck's offering is when Silver, his horse, kisses one of the little girls that are fortunate enough to have a front-row seat. The article concluded by saying that next week work will begin on the shooting of a combination circus and Wild West picture. The scenario is completed. Buck's right wrist is bandaged, the result of a sprain while handling Pay Day, bucking bronco.

The show went into Colorado after Sidney for two stands, Ft. Morgan and Wray, then it returned to Nebraska where it played McCook on August 6. The McCook stand was an important one for this article as our old friend, CHS member Joe Fleming caught the show. Joe has earlier provided us with an account of his visit to Robbins Bros. in 1925 and later in 1927, and

we are indeed fortunate to have him give us the story of his catching the show in 1929, the last time he would ever see his all time favorite circus. Joe tells us,

"On August 6, 1929 Robbins Bros. played McCook, Neb. for the last time. It had made McCook in 1925 and 1927 and Buchanan had brought his Yankee Robinson show to this little city several times in the teen years.

"The Robbins flat cars and stock cars were painted orange and the sleepers were Pullman green with a red band over the windows. The title was in this band with yellow letters. Buck Jones's Wild West Show had recently folded and Buck had come over to the Robbins show with a few head of stock and his private car was hooked onto the Robbins train. Buck's car was painted Pullman green with the name "Buck Jones" in small pale yellow letters below the window. Clarence Cordry, Sioux Indian agent came down from his home and caught the show at McCook. He was a long time and good friend of ours and had been furnishing Indians for our Annual Pow-Wow here at Trenton for years. Something had happened to the fine Robbins "Sugar Six" (gray team) and it no longer remained intact as a six up and the harness that had adorned them was now worn by a six up of blue roans that took the hippo den in parade. O. A. Gilson, the band leader once more sat on the right front corner of the Belgium Tableau and it was still used as the No. 1 bandwagon in the parade line up but this time it was pulled by a Mack truck instead of the usual six gray horses.

"By now the mules that had pulled the covered wagon had been replaced by a fine six horse team of black and white spotted horses. Eight blacks pulled the big Two Hemispheres wagon in 1929 instead of the eight grays that were used in 1927. Several of the "fairy land" wagons were on the show and this year there were Mother Goose, Old Woman in Shoe, Cinderella, and Santa Claus. The

steam calliope (former Barnum & Bailey) had carvings on the side that represented a clown blowing into the mouth piece of a French horn and another clown listening into the bell of the instrument. It was a very fine old wagon.

"Robbins Bros. had a big and gentle female elephant which was featured as "Big Bingo", the largest elephant etc. and she was the same old girl that was known as Vera in later years on the Joe B. Webb and other motorized shows.

"During the parade in McCook there is a short hill in the route and the brakes gave way on one of the tableau wagons. The driver let out a yelp at his six horse team and you couldn't believe how those big fellows lit out to out run that wagon to the bottom of the hill. You better believe other members of the parade gave this fast moving outfit the right of way, too. Back on the lot the drivers were cussing because the "old man" (Buchanan) insisted upon using telephone company type cable as guy wire for their brake cable and after it was wound around the brake shaft so many times it would snap, hence runaway wagons were no novelty to the drivers, and neither were they a pleasure to them.

"We took in the afternoon performance but towards the time for the night show to start it was pretty evident that a bad storm was going to hit before the performance was over, so we chose to pass it up and stay in the backyard where we could see what went on, not only there but in the sky as well. It might not appear this way to every one but to me there is nothing that makes a circus band sound better than if it's playing while the sky is full of lightning and distant thunder. Possibly this is because they are playing faster, trying to get the show over with before the storm hits.

Photo No. 18—Cages on Robbins Bros. flat cars, Newton, Kan., Aug. 1, 1928. Photo by Arthur Toeves. (Joe Fleming Collection)

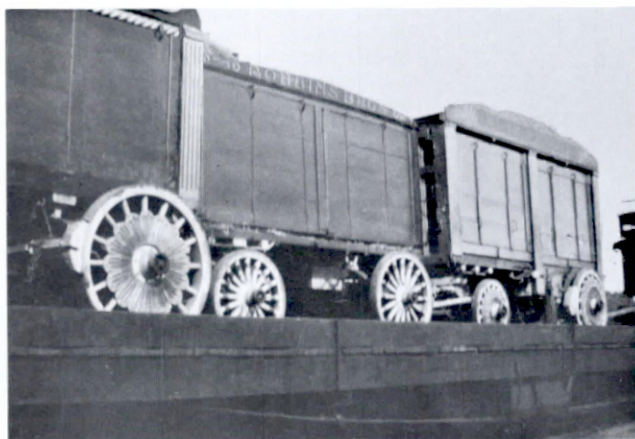
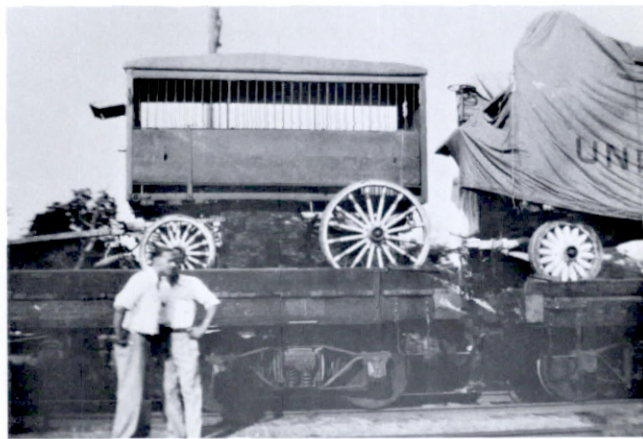
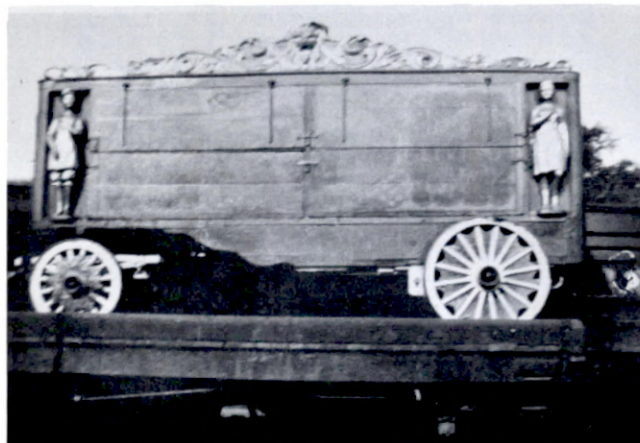


Photo No. 19—Cage and United States tableau on Robbins Bros. flat cars, Newton, Kan., Aug. 1, 1928. Photo by Arthur Toeves. (Joe Fleming Collection).





**Photo No. 20—Former Barnum & Bailey hippo den on Robbins Bros. flat car, Newton, Kan., Aug. 1, 1928. The cage housed large hay eating animals while on Robbins Bros. Photo by Arthur Toeves. (Joe Fleming Collection)**

Be it as it may be, I never heard a band sound better than the one did that night. Long before the end of the show it cut loose and rained in torrents. We loaded in the padroom where it was dry with friends who were cowboys. We saw one poor guy get half drowned. The rain caused huge pockets to form in the padroom top. A man took a pole and got under this pocket and gave it a big fast boost thus dumping a lot of water onto another man who just happened to be coming to the tent at that moment. An Indian got on his horse and made a dash for the backdoor but he was late in starting and thus got to the backdoor too late and had to turn around and come back where he took a lot of ribbing from his buddies about having to be docked on his pay for being tardy.

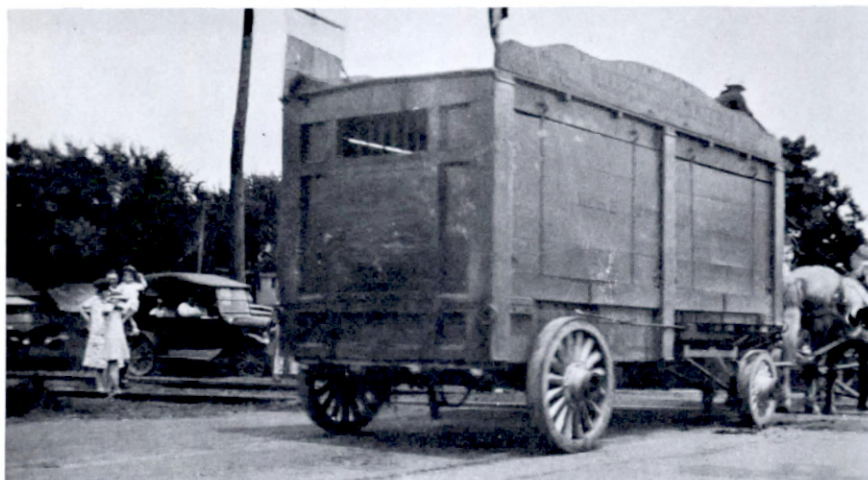
"The ticket sellers made a big whop de doo about "Buck Jones" to be in the concert and the bulk of the people stayed for it. By the time the show was

over the rain storm was also over and they had a solid grassy lot to pull it off of and a nice night to load it out. As I watched them load the last wagon onto the train I got that familiar old sinking in the stomach that any good fan got along about that stage of the day, but I had no way of knowing then that I was taking my last look at my favorite circus of all time.

"I hate to say this but I was never gung ho about any movie star of the cowboy variety and hence Buck Jones' appearance in the 1929 Robbins Bros. show didn't make any lasting impression on me. About all I remember is that for sure Buck wore a white hat and rode a white horse and will venture a guess that he did very little more than ride his horse and do some stuff with his rope.

"Buchanan must have liked Japanese acts because starting with

**Photo No. 23—Hippo den in Robbins Bros. parade, Newton, Kan., Aug. 1, 1928. This was the hippo cage used before the new bay window type den was first put into use in 1929. Note the lettering "HIP-POPOTAMUS" on the skyboard. Appearance of this cage on the show definitely dates this set as 1928. Photo by Arthur Toeves. (Joe Fleming Collection)**



**Photo No. 26—Former Barnum & Bailey hippo den showing large hay eating animals inside on Robbins Bros. lot, Newton, Kan., Aug. 1, 1928. Photo by Arthur Toeves (Joe Fleming Collection)**

Yankee Robinson in 1915 he always had a good troupe of Japs in the performance as he did in 1929. Also in 1929 he had what I considered at the time a super Arab tumbling act. I also well remember the "human fly" number that the Merkles performed. It was heavily advertised in advance notices and it was a novel stunt. They had a bar with loops on the under side and started the act by walking upside down by sticking their toes through a loop then to the next one and so on. To walk on the ceiling they had suction cups on the soles of their shoes, and it would seem like quite a stunt to break that suction on the foot that they wanted to move and still maintain the grip with the foot that was to hold them up there. I also remember the fine Joe Hodgini riding act. The performance was well attended and the people seemed to enjoy it."

Fleming also provided some other general recollections of Robbins Bros. during the three seasons he saw the show, 1925, 1927, 1929.

"Robbins Bros. to the best of my memory never presented a liberty horse act, although they had many fine horses. They had the hunting scene, high jumpers, menage, and specialties on the track. They leaned heavily towards the Wild West angle. Needless to say they had nice rosin-backs in their riding acts. Ringling-Barnum in 1923 had the first liberty acts I ever saw on any circus, then I saw no more until on Al G. Barnes in 1928.

"I never saw a printed program on Robbins Bros. but they did have a four page newspaper courier to mail out. These were large square type things like Dailey Bros., Kelly-Miller and lots of other shows used in the 1940's.

"I saw this happen during one of Robbins Bros. visits to McCook, but

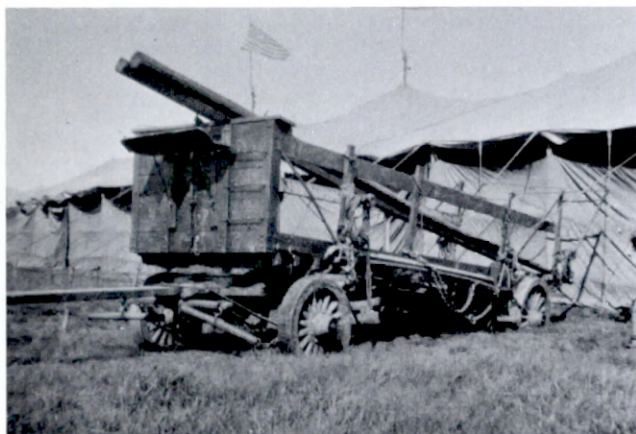
not sure if it was 1929. McCook was a division town on the Burlington railroad and there was a lot of activity in those days with switch engines chugging back and forth continuously. The driver of a pull over team stopped his horses with the end of a single tree laying on the railroad track and when a switch engine came slowly past the little front wheels jumped sideways when they ran over the single tree and when they hit the ties the engine sure came to a sudden stop—no doubt the engineer might have hit his brakes at the same time. A person would think that the weight of an engine would have crushed the single tree but this proved once more that the old circus boys built things to stand the gaff."

Fleming remembers that the show definitely had an auto exhibit in 1929 but that it didn't make too much of an impression on him as he wasn't interested a great deal in autos at that time. He doesn't recall for sure if the exhibit was in a separate tent or inside the menagerie. Other information indicates the exhibit was in its own tent as was the case in 1928.

After McCook the show continued in Nebraska with stands at Franklin, Hastings, and Fairbury, the latter the site of the old Campbell Bros. winter-quarters. Robbins moved into Kansas, August 10, at Marysville, then played Salina, Hutchinson, Wichita, Independence, Iola, Lawrence, and Atchison. On August 20 the show went into Missouri to play Albany which was followed by Maryville the next day, then came another visit to Iowa and three stands, Osceola, Mt. Pleasant, and Ft. Madison.

While Robbins Bros. was at Mt. Pleasant, Aug. 23, the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West was playing Keokuk, Iowa. The Aug. 31, 1929 *Billboard* said that on that day Fred Buchanan visited Col. Zack Miller,

**Photo No. 28—Pole wagon on Robbins Bros. lot, Newton, Kan., Aug. 1, 1928. Big top is in background. Photo by Arthur Toeves. (Joe Fleming Collection)**



**Photo No. 27—Zebra cage on Robbins Bros. lot, Newton, Kan., Aug. 1, 1928. Photo by Arthur Toeves. (Joe Fleming Collection)**

owner of the Ranch show and closed a deal in which he sold him steel flat and stock car equipment in excess to the needs of his Robbins Bros. Circus. No exact number and type of car was given, however, it said the new cars would add more than 200 ft. of car space to the Ranch train. If the amount of space mentioned was correct then it would mean that about 4 cars were involved in the sale. No further details were given in this or subsequent *Billboard* accounts so the researcher can only speculate where the rail cars involved in the transaction were located. In all probability they were stored at the Robbins quarters in Granger. If the several reports of Buchanan purchasing rail cars over the past few seasons were correct then he should have had a number of cars over and above the needs of the 30 car Robbins Bros. train. The article concluded that Col. Miller planned to visit the Robbins show on its lot at Quincy, Ill. on August 25.

Quincy was the only date in Illinois

scheduled so the show moved on to Missouri for dates in Trenton and Cameron and on September 1 made a Sunday run to Kansas for eleven stands, the first coming at Emporia, Monday, Sept. 2.

The Sept. 7, 1929 *Billboard* said that with ideal weather conditions Robbins Bros. Circus and Buck Jones Wild West continue to enjoy fine business. Osceola, Iowa, Aug. 22, because of its close proximity to Des Moines afforded Des Moines friends and fans a convenient visiting point and many were in evidence on the lot. Osceola was also the last half week stand for the J. Doug Morgan Stock Company and numerous visits between troupers of the two shows were exchanged. Quincy, Ill. was a Sunday stand at the Baldwin Park lot and a goodly crowd was there. Many from the 101 Ranch Show were matinee visitors. The usual percentage remained for Buck Jones aftershow and at the conclusion of Buck's turn with "Silver" he introduced in turn his distinguished guests, Jack Hoxie, his leading lady,

**Photo No. 29—Cage being moved into menagerie tent on Robbins Bros. lot, Newton, Kan., Aug. 1, 1928. Photo by Arthur Toeves. (Joe Fleming Collection)**

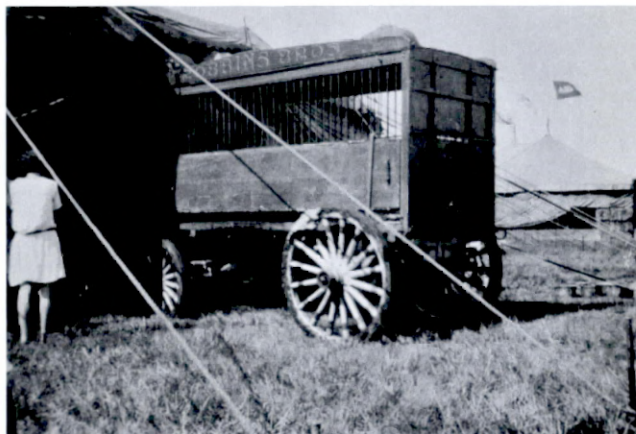




Photo No. 24—Air calliope (former Yankee Robinson) in Robbins Bros. parade, Newton, Kan., Aug. 1, 1928. Photo by Arthur Toeves. (Joe Fleming Collection)

Miss Dixie Starr, and Col. Zack Miller. As they stepped from their chairs to Buck's side on the hippodrome track they were tendered a tremendous ovation. J. D. Baynham, press agent, who joined recently, has been sent on ahead to handle the Buck Jones publicity exclusively. A final note said that a recent arrival for the performance is Walter Powell who scores highly with his wire act.

The same issue of *Billboard* ran a large photograph of O. A. Gilson's band on the Robbins Bros. lot. Twenty-one musicians are pictured.

In early September the tremendous news hit the circus world that John Ringling had purchased the American Circus Corporation, its holdings, the Peru, Ind. quarters, and the five active on the road circuses, Sells-Floto, Hagenbeck-Wallace, Al G. Barnes, John Robinson, and Sparks. Ringling announced his intention to field for the 1930 season all of the above shows plus his own Ringling-Barnum Circus, six railers, a total of some 235 cars of circus.

A couple of weeks following the Ringling purchase the *Billboard* reported that he was negotiating with Fred Buchanan for the purchase of Robbins Bros. and the deal may be closed any day. According to the article the only thing standing in the way is agreement of price. How accurate this report was is not known to the author. In any event the Robbins show was not sold to John Ringling. Possibly Buchanan wanted more than John was willing to pay. The same issue of *Billboard* also stated that Col. Zack Miller said that the 101 Ranch Wild West Show would not be sold to Ringling and that it would go out in 1930 "bigger and better" and still as an independent. Negotiations had been reported in progress for the ac-

quisition by Ringling of the 101 Ranch Show but Miller emphatically denied any deal.

In addition to Emporia, Robbins also played Kansas dates at Abilene, Beloit, Belleville, Phillipsburg, Norton, Colby, Hays, McPherson, Wellington, and Woodward. Then the show moved into Texas for a single stand, Pampa, Sept. 14, and afterwards went to Oklahoma for Clinton, Hobart, Altus, Chickasha, Guthrie, and Blackwell. On Sept. 23 Robbins returned to Kansas for Great Bend and Scott City, went into Colorado for a single day at Lamar, Sept. 25, then went back into Kansas for a two day stand at Dodge City, Sept. 26-27, one day in Liberal on the 28th, and finally again into Texas.

Frank (Doc) Stewart writing in his column, "Sawdust," in the Sept. 28, 1929 *Billboard* said that the state of Oklahoma had seen a pile of circuses of late. Playing within its borders had been Sells-Floto with Tom Mix Himself, Hagenbeck-Wallace, Robbins Bros. and Al G. Barnes. Stewart in a homespun, colorful way, describes Buchanan thusly.

"Now comes the Right Hon. Frederick Buchanan and his Robbins Bros. Circus and hanging right to Frederick's frock are Buster Cronin and the Al G. Barnes Four Ring Wild Animal show. Buster is doing right well, according to Messrs. Mugivan and Bowers (who had just sold to John Ringling). But Frederick—he always does well. He has been known to play Robbins Bros. in 'morgue villages' and capacity greeted the gentlemanly ex-editor from Iowa. Frederick is simply another example of what Iowa grows besides corn."

Not much appeared in the trade publications in September concerning Robbins Bros. but the Sept. 21, 1929 *Billboard* did record that the Curtis Brothers, Happy and Hooey, joined the show's clown alley for the remainder of the season.

The Oct. 5, 1929 *Billboard* reported that Robbins Bros. at Great Bend,



Photo No. 31—Robbins Bros. on lot, Newton, Kan., Aug. 1, 1928. Pictured in foreground are the concession stands and storage tent on midway with pit show (left) and sideshow (center) bannerlines in background. Photo by Arthur Toeves. (Joe Fleming Collection)

Kan., Sept. 23, had a big crowd in town at noon to see the parade which was commented upon very favorably, and to me (Chas. Adress, author of the article) it surely was a real treat, possibly more than to anyone else, as some of the fine tableau wagons and pageant stuff recalled to memory the big shows which have abandoned parades. Especially noticeable was the big band wagon (obviously Two Hemispheres) which is still attractive after its many years of service. Adress continued,

"The parade is a real feature, and the horses, trappings and costumes all looked good considering the season of the year. The show itself is much improved from what it was two years ago when Ike Pritchard and I visited it in Larned and also here (Great Bend). While Fred Buchanan is known to get more show for less money invested in salaries and equipment than any man in the circus business, he has really added some features this year that are in line with the big ones, which include the Jap Troupe, the Arab tumblers, Buck Jones, etc.

"Many farmers drove to town during the noon hour, saw the parade and drove back to their important farm work with the assertion that they would come in for the night show, which they did, and while the p.m. show was good, it was still better at night, in fact the show did a better business than the John Robinson Circus did on the 20th of last month. Fred (Buchanan) expressed himself well satisfied. Whitey Morse is the legal adjuster."

On Sept. 30 Robbins Bros. moved into Texas at Dalhart which was followed by Memphis, Vernon, Wichita Falls,

Gainesville, Sherman, Clarksville, Paris, Greenville, and Mt. Pleasant. A tour of Arkansas began, Oct. 11, at Stamps and then came Camden, Stuttgart, Forest City, Helena, Marianna, and Paragould. A short trip through Missouri was next with initial date at Popular Bluff, October 19. A report in the *Billboard* also dated Oct. 19 said that Buck Jones had left Robbins Bros. and at last report was at a Texas rodeo. He took his private car and 15 head of stock with him. The article said that Buck is understood to be appearing at the rodeo using a Hollywood gag. What his plans are for the future has not been disclosed. The article concluded that Robbins Bros. was still putting on its wild west after-show feature and apparently isn't worrying over Buck's absence. The date Buck left the show was not given. In all probability it was at one of the Texas stands, a couple of weeks before the end of the season. How long Buck played at rodeos is not known to the author. Shortly after he left Robbins Bros. he was back in Hollywood and again appearing in movies.

After going into Missouri at Popular Bluff only four more stands remained on the 1929 route, Dexter, Charleston, Fredericktown, and De Soto, played Oct. 24, which was the final date of the season. According to the E. W. Adams route we are using the notation is made that several stands which were to follow De Soto were cancelled on account of bad weather. It was Buchanan's policy in late season to just knock off any billed stands which were likely to be ruined by inclement weather setting in and return to quarters.

About two weeks prior to the close at De Soto the *Billboard* had carried an article quoting Bob Buchanan that he had completed negotiations with Sidney Strotz and Paddy Harmon to

present Robbins Bros. and Buck Jones as part of the Chicago Stadium Circus to be staged next spring. According to the report the show would open March 7, 1930 in the Chicago Stadium and would play an engagement of 23 days with the possible extension of one additional week. The performance would be presented in three rings and two stages and include a number of high class European attractions that are to be implemented especially for this engagement. Nothing further appeared about the Buchanan-Chicago Stadium deal. Whether or not there were serious negotiations at all or if the report was only a fabrication, the fact is that Robbins Bros. never made the Stadium. Of course the nation's poor economic condition by the spring of 1930 could have altered any serious plans for such an engagement.

A few days after Robbins Bros. closed its 1929 season and returned to its Granger quarters, Black Friday hit Wall Street, the stock market crash. Fortunately the blow came after most show's had completed their season. One medium sized rail show, the Floyd and Howard King owned 15 car Gentry Bros. Circus failed in the fall of 1929 but its troubles had gone back to a year earlier when a lengthy spell of rain and mud put it on the skids from which the show never fully recovered. But for the most part, 1929, had been a fine season for circuses.

The Nov. 9, 1929 *Billboard* advised that Robbins Bros. was now back in Granger. The 30 car train passed through Des Moines on its final lap to quarters for the winter and officials of the circus told the local press that they had just finished one of the most successful seasons of their existence, having stayed on the road two weeks longer than had been planned.

A week later the *Billboard* said that Crazy Ray Choisser, the show's steam calliope player, had also been superintendent of the service department during the recent season.

In the meantime the Gentry Bros. Circus which had folded earlier in Paris, Tenn. had its equipment repossessed by the Donaldson Lithograph Co. of Newport, Ky. and moved for storage at the former Hagenbeck-Wallace and John Robinson winterquarters at West Baden, Ind. The Dec. 28, 1929 *Billboard* said that Donaldson sold most of the Gentry animals and equipment; three elephants, horses, wagons, and equipment to the Otis L. Smith Shows (railroad carnival); all canvas, menagerie animals, and part of the wardrobe to the motorized Downie Bros. Circus; rest of the wardrobe, some ring stock, and other equipment to Sam B. Dill who would be framing a motorized Gentry Bros. circus to go out of West Baden in the spring of 1930. The article also had the interesting information that Fred Buchanan of Robbins Bros. had purchased several wagons. A final note said that practically all of the heavy baggage wagons, pole wagon, and some cages, and dens are still stored at West Baden and will be disposed of.

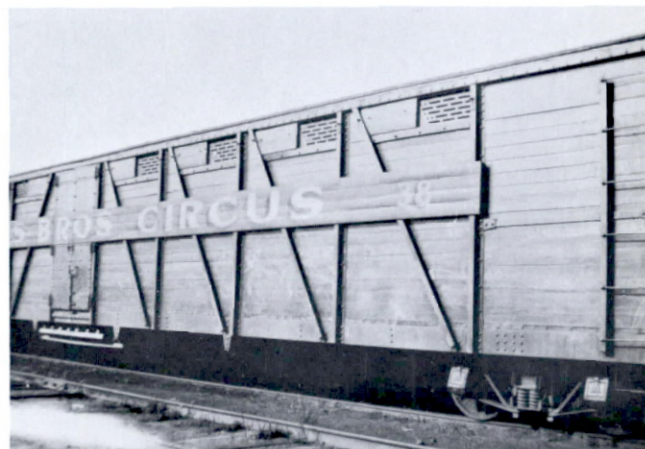
The only wagon we have definite knowledge of that Buchanan bought at the sale of Gentry Bros. was the ex Ringling Bros. Russia tableau wagon. Tradition has long held that Buchanan paid only \$50.00 for it. He was glad to get it, giving him another nation tableau to go in the Robbins Bros. "Parade of Nations" street parade. It was moved on a railroad system flat car to the Granger quarters where it would be renovated and join the other Robbins tableau wagons in the 1930 street parade. A full history of the Russia wagon will be given in the next installment.

And so 1929 passed into history. The season had been a good one for Buchanan and his Robbins Bros. and some reports indicate it was the all

Photo No. 21—Baggage wagons on Robbins Bros. flat cars, Newton, Kan., Aug. 1, 1928. Photo by Arthur Toeves. (Joe Fleming Collection)



Photo No. 22—Robbins Bros. elephant car No. 38, Newton, Kan., Aug. 1, 1928. Photo by Arthur Toeves. (Joe Fleming Collection)



time best but the late E. W. Adams contended 1927 holds that honor. Although the stock market crash hit with amazing suddenness the country didn't collapse economically overnight. Few economists predicted the downturn would last any length of time. It hadn't even been termed a depression as yet. Most showmen felt that by time the 1930 circus season rolled around all would be rosy again and made their winter plans accordingly, fully expecting the coming circus tour to be another goodie. In due time the fast approaching great depression would be felt, in the circus world, everywhere.

#### EPILOGUE

"Old timers" and the author can be included in that category will be amazed to see the famed Arthur Toeves set of Robbins Bros. photos (Joe Fleming Collection) is dated Aug. 1, 1928 at Newton, Kansas. For years it had been accepted the set was taken in 1929. I have had prints obtained from Fleming over 30 years and until just recently never suspected they were not dated 1929. Over the years I discussed certain wagons in the prints with the late Bill Woodcock Sr. and Dick Conover and these were 1929 shots as far as we were concern-

ed. Well, now, why are they suddenly dated 1928. It's an interesting story. When Joe Fleming purchased the negatives of this set, along with a number of other sets, from the sister of the late Arthur Toeves many years ago, the only dates were those written on some of the envelopes which contained the negs. It was confusing to determine the correct date on some of the envelopes but this was all that was available to identify the prints. The date on this particular Robbins set read 1929 so that is what we accepted and it was never questioned. It was only in recent weeks when I was attempting to get the exact date and stand for the set to use with the photo captions that I further questioned Fleming on the original identification as provided by Toeves sister. He wrote me that on the envelope containing this set in question was written, "Robbins Bros., Newton, Kansas, Aug. 1, 1929". Well, that immediately triggered some sort of bell in my mind. According to the E. W. Adams Robbins routes we are using the show played Newton, Kan., Aug. 1, 1928 not 1929. Believing there still might be some kind of explanation and that the set would be 1929 rather than 1928 I decided to put it to the only dual test I knew of, and that is determining which steam callipe appeared in

the Toeves set. If the old Forepaugh Lion chariot steamer wagon was there then it was 1928, if the ex Barnum & Bailey, Clown and Horn steamer was there, it was 1929. Unfortunately, no kind of steam calliope can be found in the set. Well, then on to the second test. Check on the hippo den. If the newly built hippo den with the bay window is there, then the set is dated 1929. (Note photo no. 7 showing the new hip cage which Joe Fleming took at McCook, Neb. that season). If the former hippo den is shown, then it has to be 1928. That did it. The old hippo den is pictured twice, once loaded on a flat car, and again in the street parade, and on the skyboard is clearly lettered "Hippopotamus". So, 1928, is the correct date. The date, August 1, and stand, Newton, Kan. as written on the Toeves envelope were correct but unfortunately an error had been made in putting the year as 1929 instead of 1928, which was correct. The error was not discovered in time to run the set with the 1928 installment, however the content and quality of the photos are so outstanding we are running them here in the 1929 segment. Actually, there seemed to be very little difference in the appearance of the physical equipment over the two seasons, just the steam calliopes and hippo dens as indicated before.

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\* Pictured in Jul-Aug 1982 *Bandwagon* articles on Mr. Butler by Dave Price and Fred Pfening.

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# Mud on Your Shoes, Sand in Your Butter: Ringling-Barnum 1940

by Kenneth D. Hull

Before recounting our first season with the big Ringling-Barnum show in 1940 it is necessary to go back to the previous year. Both my wife Edris and I stayed off the road in 1939 after being with the Barnes-Floto show the year before, but my dull hotel clerking job was just too much. I kept thinking about going back to the circus, and told my wife, but she said she was finished with show business and did not want to hear any more about going back on the road. She was content with her job modeling for a California dress manufacturer and wanted to remain settled down. Me, I had to be on the go and being with a big tent circus was one sure way to do this.

I talked her into taking a week off from our work, and we drove to Walla Walla, Washington where the Ringling show appeared on August 22nd. It was a thrill to see the show rolling into town, arriving via the Union Pacific. I don't have to tell you I was excited, but I was beginning to think Edris felt the same way. We both knew that later in the season we could see Ringling in Los Angeles where we lived, but I wanted to see them now and arrange to get back in their fold.

The show played on a beat-up old fairground. The show arrived quite early so all was quickly made ready for the two performances. We found many old friends from the Barnes circus in 1938. This, of course, was a huge advantage in getting back in the business. We talked with Walter McClain, then Theo Forstall and many others from Barnes. Pat Valdo took us to the afternoon performance, and before attending the show we ate lunch with Walter McClain, eating on the workingmen's side of the cookhouse. We, of course, attended the evening show and visited with more



The author in uniform on the Ringling-Barnum front door during the 1940 season. Author's collection.

friends before driving to Yakima, a distance of over a hundred and thirty miles, where we took in the circus two more times. We were there ahead of the show and once more observed the unloading and moving to the lot. I can still see Walter on his horse Harold going down the street in Yakima leading the long string of bulls and waving to us, making the towners wonder how we knew this man with the big cigar, gloves and coiled whip he always carried when moving the show.

We were both convinced after leaving the circus there that we were going to be all set for the 1940 season.

The Sarasota, Florida winter quarters of the Ringling Bros.-Barnum and Bailey Circus about the time the author was there. Pfening Archives.

For Edris it was a shoo-in, but no one would say for sure what I was going to do, but Forstall thought I could be placed on inside tickets. The red wagon was filled with Ringling men except Forstall who was from the Barnes show. We made a quick trip back to Los Angeles, but we did take off one afternoon to go to San Francisco to see the World's Fair. Red White, a side show ticket seller on Barnes-Floto in 1938 was there selling tickets for the Sally Rand Nude Ranch, one of the big attractions. We learned he too was making plans to be back on the Ringling tent in 1940. See how the bug bites you?

After seeing the show again in Los Angeles I was really dreaming about getting back on the road, and it became more difficult to carry out my hotel duties. Even Edris wanted to go back. During the winter we wrote Pat Valdo, Fred DeWolf, Theo Forstall, and even Henry North. They all replied, but none of them told me what I was going to be doing. I was told to come to Sarasota and something would be worked out. I still have these letters plus the contract that was mailed to Edris to sign and return.

As I recall it was early March when we quit our chores in California, and loaded our little Willys coupe and headed for Florida. We both wondered what it would be like to be on Ringling-Barnum. Edris still had her trunk from the Barnes show, and it fit in the back end of our little car. We have owned numerous bigger cars since then, but none of them would have held that trunk. We owned little in those days so the tiny car was not overloaded for this long journey to Sarasota. I do not recall every detail of the trip but do remember we mostly kept driving in order to save the





money we were going to need once we arrived in Florida. After arriving we found a room, and wasted no time in getting out to the winter quarters. The man at the quarter's gate allowed us to enter after we convinced him we were to be on the show. We found old friends and began to meet new people. Edris had to start working right away, but I had nothing to do so I wandered around the quarters and watched all the preparations for the coming season.

I watched all the new equipment being made ready to roll, and other times I went out in back of the quarters where I found so many of the old time wagons just going to pot in the weather. Wheels and more wheels were to be seen. There were baggage wheels and parade wagon wheels off the many cages. This was the time

**The United States bandwagon, built by Bode in 1903, slowly dies in the back fields of the Sarasota quarters during the 1940's. Pfening Archives.**

that many of the wagons were being put on rubber. I have thought many times what lesser shows would have given to have had a lot of this equipment. I understand most of it was burned later on for the metal in the vehicles.

It was on the cold and cloudy side most of the time. I found out that most show people went to a certain garage to arrange for what they called "dead storage" for their cars while on tour.

**The traditional blessing for the show is given by a Priest and altar boys before the beginning of a season during this period. Pfening Archives.**



Since the garage lost most of its business in the summer with the winter tourists going home, it gave the circus people real low rates to store a car during the slow season. They removed the battery, put the car on jacks, and made it safe during the circus tour. I do not recall the cost, but it was very low and we were glad to know the car would be tended to correctly while we were away.

At last came get-away day and the big trip to New York. I am sure most of you have seen the picture, "The Greatest Show on Earth," and its scenes of the brightly loaded train leaving quarters. It was pretty much this way when I was there. All day long the show loaded the heavy wagons and the animals on the first part of the circus needed in New York and Boston. The big end, including all the tents, and most of the baggage and seat wagons, were still being made ready for a later move North. These items were not needed in the buildings. Only one big engine was attached to the train, and it spun its drivers trying to get the heavy load moving. The Priest was there to give the show blessings, and the show people were hanging out on the steps of the cars all waving good bye. It was a thrill to be aboard and to know that we were a small part of this huge organization. Edris and I had been assigned a lower berth and both knew the train was not very crowded. We were told this was due to so many others who would meet the train in New York.

We moved on the Atlantic Coast Line. I have noted from the first route card that season that the show moved to New York on the ACL, REP, PRR, and NYNH&H lines so you can see the train had to make a number of changeovers. Our first stop for feed for the animals was at Florence, South Carolina. This stop was made during daylight hours, and I remember rushing over to some beanery near the rail yards for some sandwiches. Some folks on the train had prepared for the long trip by bringing food with them, but we had not. Milt Taylor and his wife Alma were in our car. We had known them back on the Barnes show where he was a producing clown and Alma was a rider and now they both were doing the same on Ringling. They had a lot of fine food like fried chicken which they insisted they share with us. The Taylors were good people and had been on shows for years. We knew few of the other people in our car, but we did meet several on this move. It seems that most of the time we slept or sat and watched the view from the sleeper. It was getting colder as the train moved along toward winter weather. The second feed stop was at Washington, D.C., and I recall seeing the Washington

Monument way off in the distance as the train moved by.

It was midnight when we got off the train in New York, after coming up to the surface of the city from Grand Central Station. This brightly lit city was a sight to see. I had gotten a fellow by the name of Bill Webster a job on Barnes to run my tax box when I was moved to the red wagon, and now this same man was the time keeper on Ringling, and had made the 1939 season as an inside ticket seller. So he had been to the big city. Together with Webster we all got a taxi and Bill directed the driver to take us to the Belvedere Hotel on 48th Street, I think it was. I recall the hotel back-side faced toward the Garden. Bill had stayed there in 1939, and stated it was a good place and handy to our work. The hotel was all he said it was, except the rate for circus people was seventeen dollars a week for a double room. Now we knew the show was going to pay us more for the two indoor stands as they did not feed us or put us up in New York or Boston. We did not have much money so we registered and took the room for only one week, then looked for a less costly place to stay for the remainder of the New York date. The place we took was not much, sort of a rooming house, but a number of show people were there for the entire stay as it did not cost much. It was close to the Garden and there were a lot of beaneries in the neighborhood.

This was not the Garden one knows today. This structure was on Eighth Ave. between 49th and 50th Streets. After being there only a short time I learned I was to be with McCormick Steele, the man who ran the front door. The first duty we door and ticket men had was to keep the crowds away from the 49th Street door as the show was being moved into the building. Show tractors and hired trucks hauled the wagons to the buildings from some rail yard way far up town, and they wanted to get the show off the flats and into the building in quick order. The wagons and cages, plus all other walking animals were spotted in the basement. Few baggage wagons were needed except for performers' trunks and props. The red ticket wagon was used for an office as was the yellow ticket wagon Webster used for his time keeping duties. The show left some bulls, I believe five, at the winter quarters for use as work animals. The circus side show was brought along but was not run in the same manner as on the road. Instead, no admission was charged to see either it or the menagerie, both of which were set up in the Garden basement. Many patrons would never bother to go below to view all of these free attractions that the one ticket entitled them to see.



The opening spec, the Return of Marco Polo, is shown here in Madison Square Garden at the start of the 1940 tour. Cage at right is for one of the Alfred Court acts. Pfening Archives.

After a couple of days rehearsal the show opened on a Friday night, April 5, and continued until closing night on April 30. Alfred Court had just been brought over from France with his three arenas full of all kinds of wild animals. I believe it was the afternoon before the show opened, while the three animal acts were working out, that something happened that was most upsetting. Edris and I were sitting in a box seat watching the acts perform. We were in front of ring number three, and prop hands, performers, and other show personnel

The great Alfred Court and his mixed cat act during the 1940 season. Pfening Archives.



were not far from the cages watching these wonderful acts. The cats were just coming from the chutes when a black leopard came in and rushed to the far side of the cage right in front of us. This beast gave a big leap straight up, but this did not worry us as netting was drawn tight over the arena, and the animal hung there and started to nudge its head through the netting. All the time the animals men outside the cage were hitting its paws trying to get it to drop to the cage floor. The box we were seated in was not more than six feet above the arena floor, and all at once I realized the big cat was coming out. We moved to the first level behind these seats and halted in time to see the cat drop to the arena floor and hesitate only a minute. Prop hands and everybody else climbed up rigging or up any other safe or high place. The cat made a big jump and was right in the seats about the same place we had been. We just stood

there and watched the animal move on up over the seats and into a tunnel-like ramp which ran around the building. I assure you we were more than a little frightened. Cage hands cornered and caught the animal in the tunnel shortly afterward, and some quick thinking persons shut the doors so it could not get into the basement where all the animals and the horses were. We later learned the black cat had killed a valuable snow leopard in the chutes and was trying to get away.

Court had beautiful tigers, leopards, black bears, polar bears, pumas, and great danes. Three people worked the acts, changing around for different performances. The arenas were painted blue and the chute and the nets were red. All his props were the very best. One never saw these animals in the menagerie as they were all housed in their cages out in the back yard. It took a number of cages for each ring so the show used more cages for just this one act than many lesser shows carried in their entire menagerie.

The New York stand was a long one, and most people on the show longed for the canvas season to begin. Many came down with colds during this engagement. During recent years I have visited a number of big city buildings and I note the discarded trash left after each performance with little effort made to clean it up before the next show. I suppose this is due to the cost of everything today, especially help of any kind. After each performance back then, a big crew entered the seats and began to work their way down from the back, picking up and cleaning as they came down. This operation was interesting to watch, and they did a fine job.

I was assigned to help tend the doors on the 50th Street side of the building. Along with me was a huge jolly man who worked for the Garden. He wore a uniform that would put most hotel doormen to shame, and had worked there for years. No circus ticket sellers or takers, or inside ticket sellers sold tickets in this building as the Garden had their own crews controlled by the unions. At this stand I still did not know if I would be selling reserved seat tickets on the road, or working on the front door. I did have a job though, and Edris was busy as a performer.

On closing night I watched the rigging torn down, and saw the big machines come in to scrape all the dirt of the Garden floor. A bunch of us chipped in and got a cab to take us way up town to the sleepers, where I was then assigned to a car with the other doormen, ticket men, and the show announcer, Art Springer. Edris was given an upper berth in the single girls' car. We were set to move on to Boston, and the cars had been sitting



Edris Hull in costume, 1940 season. Author's collection.

for a month with no heat or hot water, and they were cold.

Somewhere after the train had stopped on route, Steele came to the car and told us where to meet him when we arrived in Boston. It began to appear that I was going to be on the front door. In Boston, the building was right next to the Manger Hotel, but Edris and I did not check in there as we were not loaded with money this early in the season. It was cold in Boston and the train was parked near at hand so we slept in our own cars. We did check into the Manger once between shows to get a hot bath. Edris could get showers in the building, but

Henry Ringling North during the 1940 season. The Hulls felt well treated by him. Pfening Archives.



I had to wash as best I could in a wash pan and with only cold water. This is tough to do well in early spring in Boston. Again we tended doors and helped control crowds and the circus did heavy business during the week stand, same as in New York.

The show closed on May 11, and moved to Baltimore where the canvas season began. When we got to the lot everything was up and ready, and the new spread of canvas was a sight. The big top was only a four pole top, and it was blue with red wide wall and all the other canvas was white. The round tubes going to their different places for the air conditioning stood out. The show used a horse top for the performing horses. No draft stock was used to move baggage wagons. It was dry in Baltimore, and the show continued to do business. One thing that stood out for me on this stand was that when the elephants came on the lot, and saw the five or so bulls that had been left in quarters for the New York and Boston dates, they all made a big ado and noises like I had never heard made. I am sure the elephants were all glad to see one another again.

Soon before we left for Washington, D.C., Ed Kelly, the assistant manager, called me aside and informed me that Edris and I were being moved in together in the fourth section. A lower berth was waiting for us that night. Few of the ticket men or front door men had wives on the show, but I know I was the only one riding on the last section and living with my wife. I have no proof why this occurred, but we have always felt that it was Buddy North's doing as he was always good to us.

The PRR moved us to Washington, D.C. where the lot was almost always under water. It rained, and then it rained some more, but business was still good. After three days the Pennsylvania moved us into Philadelphia where we set up on Broad and Erie Streets. It was still wet and cold. Edris had to lay off a few days here after she came down with a bad cold. Those circus sleepers were not the best place to nurse a cold, but she soon was better and back performing. Some sorry looking carnival set up out beyond the circus's front end, but I was informed this happened every year in that city.

One day stands with an occasional two dayer followed Philadelphia. In spite of the continued rain and cold, we got to see many big cities for the first time. In most of them, the show did business. The performance was long but the Norths saw to it that the entire show was given at every afternoon and night, even if now then the show did poor evening business. During the season I was president of the Circus Model Builders and Owners

Association, and in some Pennsylvania town a big group of members were at the train when we pulled in with a banner saying "Welcome President Hull." I soon learned that the East was full of fans and model builders, and every city had a big turnout of all kinds of people to see the show come in and set up. I met many fans and model builders, and, even though it was usually after eleven at night, many asked us to their homes to talk and for a bite to eat.

During May and early June the show jumped back and forth from one state to another. We were in Ohio, then in a few days back into Pennsylvania, and then New York state again. At most stands heavy rains were with us. At Youngstown, Ohio on June 12, the lot was way out in the country and it was on sort of a muddy hill. So many people came to the evening performance that the spec, the horse, and bull numbers had to be omitted as there was no room for the acts to get into the big top. We went to bed and when we awoke the next morning we were still in Youngstown, and the poor working men were still loading flats on the track next to us. Bradford, Pa., was the next stand, but of course we were late. The show gave the entire performance, however. It was over a hundred and seventy miles to Bradford, so we were lucky to get in and give two shows. Later arrivals happened quite often due to the mud and the long evening shows. I was working on the front door and all the time was hoping I would be moved inside to sell reserved seat tickets. As the front door would become less busy after a performance began, some of us would close down our gates and go inside to help sell the concert or after-show tickets. They were only a quarter, but we had to do our best to move these tickets. Very few people remained to see this part of the circus in most cities, and I often wondered why they had the thing.

June found the show up in New England for a few stands, still doing business at most places and still playing many of the stands under wet canvas. Most of the time the eight air conditioner wagons would be moved to the lot and then not even hooked up or loaded with ice as the big top was too cool as it was. The big blue top made it dark inside even during the day, but this made all the lighting effects much better. With some late arrivals and the matinee show often not beginning until four or even five we would do our work, run to the cookhouse to grab a bite, and go right back to the job. We ran the afternoon crowd out and let the night people in. And on and on it went.

After leaving New England we went seventeen weeks, afternoon and night, with never a day off. This was



Sleeper #71, the Indiana, on the show in 1940. Frank Norton photo.

over four months and it became a grind. As I recall somewhere up in

Newspaper ad for date at Syracuse, New York, season 1940. Pfening Archives.

## SYRACUSE WEDNESDAY JULY 3

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THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH  
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at Show Grounds.

New England, I was at long last moved inside to sell reserved seat tickets, working for Tommie Haynes. He wore a black uniform and ran the big box right inside the big top. He did not miss a trick in deciding when to put down canvas for a straw house, or when to kill sections of seats on a poor day. He would judge from downtown ticket sales pretty much what the day was going to be. This season the show had the William J. Burns Detective Agency watching us, but most of the time it appeared they had an eye on the front door ticket men, and the inside ticket sellers for the reserved seats. What a joke. Towners did not get taken as much on this circus as they did on the lesser shows, but I have always felt that if a lot of money passed through ones hands it might be that some stray bits of change could get misplaced. One day a book might be written telling how all of this took place.

On July 20, the show moved to Chicago playing on the lake front outside Soldiers' Field. The circus cookhouse was set up under the huge stands. It rained some but all at once it turned hot and the weather remained this way until we closed on the 27th. From there we went to Milwaukee, then Madison, and then several Iowa stands. It was still hot in most cities. Makato on August 4 was our first Minnesota date and it did not seem the town was going to be much as the downtown ticket sales were nothing. It was hot and we arrived coming in on the Rock Island line from Mason City, Iowa, a distance of around a hundred and seventeen miles, so all was on time. Before the doors were open the crowds started to arrive on the lot and once the doors opened they kept right on coming. The town is not so large so the fire department and police did little to hold the show back from selling tickets. This matinee was more than a sell out; it was a huge turn away with many of the folks being put on the straw around the entire big top. Half of that afternoon's performance had to be omitted as the people were sitting almost right next to the ring curbs. What a crowd was in the big top that



afternoon! Once the crowd had departed the ground was a cover of nothing but coke bottles. The stands had a big day that afternoon. As I recall the day was a Sunday, and the night show turned out to be not so hot. Everyone came to see the circus in the afternoon that day. Many times Sunday night was a bummer for the show.

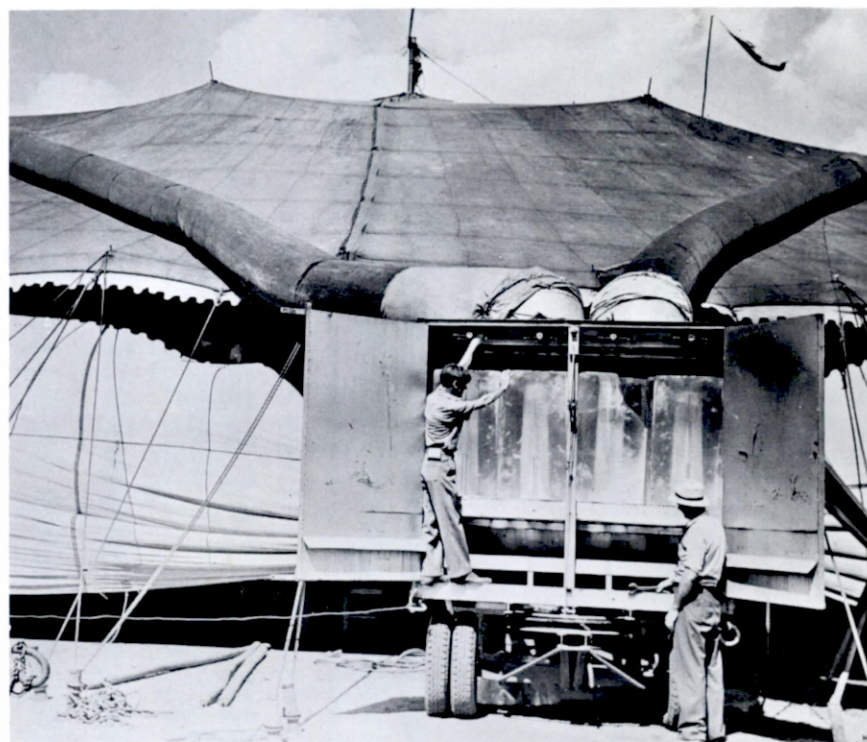
The heat followed us on through Minnesota and into the Dakotas but now we had dust and at many stands it was bad. Fargo, North Dakota was booked for a Sunday but we moved across the river to Moorhead, Minnesota as the churches did not want the circus in town on Sunday. The show unloaded in Fargo and moved to Moorhead where the performance went on to good business. This was all part of the territory where we played for seventeen weeks with never a break. I doubt if many of today's circus people would stand for a thing like that.

Business was fine at most stands and the show played another day or so in Iowa and then moved to Nebraska. Grand Island must have been about as far West as Ringling went that season. Most stands in this state were good. I remember the trains were held a while at Nebraska City because a cage broke loose from the tractor hitch as it pulled a long string of these wagons. It ran into some man's house, which upset the fellow no end. Show fixers squared it, and the show moved to St. Joe using the Missouri Pacific which took us way out of the way and made us late arriving. St. Joseph was home for both Paul Jerome, a clown on the show, and myself. It was fun coming home with the circus and Edris and I got a big write up in one of the local papers. It was right there on the front page, and I still have this story today. We got to see a lot of old friends while in town. It poured and poured there that night and we loaded out for Topeka on the Santa Fe. This was a fine railroad for the Big Show as they tried to always get us in on time.

**The massive blue big top with canvas ducts for the air conditioning is shown from the back yard. Gordon Potter collection.**

The heat and the terrible humidity stayed with us as we moved through Kansas, Oklahoma, and then back to Kansas. We then played more dates in Missouri. We just went on day after day, seven days a week. The last stand in Missouri was Joplin, then the show went back to Oklahoma for some dates, and then on to Texas. Fort Worth, and Dallas had us for two days each. Arkansas had the show in two cities, Little Rock and Pine Bluff. In

**The huge blocks of ice used in the air conditioning system are being checked in 1940. Chester Photo Service.**



this last city one of the show bulls did not want to go into her car so was pushed in. When the car was opened the next morning this bull was found dead. I will never forget how Walter McClain cried and cried over the death of this animal. We knew he loved every one of his big charges. More dates in Texas followed, then a couple in Louisiana, and then back to more in Texas. We then jumped back to Louisiana, then on to Alabama. All of this time the weather was quite nice as it was September, and we were down South. At Temple, Texas we noticed many troop trains on the siding the night we loaded out, and knowing the war was going on in Europe, many of us got the feeling it was now getting closer to our country. These were National Guard Troops going to camp somewhere. I got a hair cut in this town the day we were there. I have no idea why I remember this, and I also never dreamed that day that I would be back in Temple one day to get a commission as an officer at Camp Hood.

At Mobile, Alabama, the Royal American Show, then a big railroad carnival, day and dated us; they were playing the Greater Gulf Fair. All of their wagons were spotted and mixed in with the Ringling wagons as we played right next door to the fair. I do not think I have ever seen so many show wagons at one time. I remember we visited with James Edgar who we had known on the Barnes show where he sold inside reserved seat tickets. He now had an ice show on Royal American, and later took out the

Sparks Circus on ten cars. It was now mid-October and the show swung north going to Montgomery and Birmingham, Alabama, then on into Tennessee where it was higher country and the weather was much cooler. All of the air conditioning wagons were hauled to the lot and then moved back to the trains, but they were seldom used. We had some nice clear days, but we had more cold wet ones.

By late October we were in Virginia and at long last we had a Sunday off at Roanoke. We were in the Bible Belt, and received more days off on Sunday. Early in the season while in New England we had met circus fans Bill Day and Jim Hoyer. They had driven down to Roanoke and wanted to drive us to the next stand and pay our motel bill so we could all talk circus. We had a fine time together and they took pictures of us. At this time allow me to say that during the season we were entertained by Charles Doelker at Harrisburg, and by Bob Good at Allentown, both in Pennsylvania, Mr. and Mrs. John Dvorak, and Mr. and Mrs. Verne Fussell of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and Gordon Potter, while in Chicago. We always visited late at night. Some of these fine people have since passed away, but we will never forget them, and so many others we got to met along the route.

We moved south into the Carolinas, and into the final weeks of the season. The nights were really getting cold, and quite often the rain made for muddy lots. I will always remember the roar of the big yellow cars struggling to get the show off the lots. What a mess they would make after digging deep ruts all over the fields. It was tough trying to keep warm at nights and we ticket sellers would gather around the show light plant trying to take on some of the heat.

On November 1, the show was playing at Columbia, South Carolina, and that day the local folks sent a draft board out to the circus grounds to register the men for future military call. Midgets, clowns, working men, performers, and ticket men were all in line getting their draft registration over with. I had the feeling right then that the service was going to have me one day.

We played more stands in Georgia, then Florida. It was still cold when we traveled down the east coast but business was still good for the most part. It was November and we were all aware that the season would soon be ending at Sarasota on the 18th. The show gave two performances there; then the wagons were pulled right on to the winter quarters without being loaded on the trains.

Everyone was paid between shows. I had written ahead to the garage to deliver our car between shows, which



The air conditioning wagons are shown on a flat. These units were often hauled to the lot but not used. Gordon Potter collection.

they did along with many others. I parked the car right out near the dressing room where we could load Edris's trunk the minute she was finished. We removed all our belongings from the sleeper between shows, and were pretty well set to head out for California the minute we were free of our duties. On this day one makes a lot of final tips to the car porter, the cookhouse waiter, and Edris to her water boy. We gave some to the mailman for his good services all season long and continued to say good bye everywhere we went. We both were asked to return for another season but we did not give an answer.

Deep in our hearts we were sure we were not going to return.

The show had good business in Sarasota and I never tried harder to sell more tickets than I did that last day. As the crowds were moving out into the night I was right there on my folding grand stand chair trying to sell more concert tickets for the last time. I know I had a few tears in my eyes as I was trying to push these tickets. I loved to hear that big band play and know that as I write this article today, that I'll never hear it again. It, and that wonderful circus, are gone. In a way I am glad we never returned because in my mind the show started to go down hill in 1941. Edris has always stated she liked being a performer, but that was it. As for me, I loved these big rail circuses, every part of them.

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# The Keeper Will Enter The Cage:

## Early American Wild Animal Trainers

by Stuart Thayer

On a day shortly after Christmas in 1819 in Nuremberg, Germany Henri Martin (1793-1882), a French Rider temporarily out of work, entered the cage of a four year-old tiger, stayed a few minutes and emerged unscathed.<sup>1</sup> It was apparently the first such meeting in circus history. As time went on Martin taught the tiger, named Atir, to sit up, lie down and other simple movements. He became, then, the first "trainer" and his fame and reputation grew apace.

Thetard's description of Martin's introduction of himself into the cage, little by little, sounds like a method worth recommending. He first ventured a scratch or two through the bars, then went into a separated cage with the beast, that is, a cage divided in the center by bars. Then he introduced his head and shoulders into the tiger's half of the den. Finally, he entered fully.

We find a similar progression in America, though by several different persons. Early menagerie advertisements speak of the keeper of the lion, as an example, combing the lion's mane through the bars. One ad tells that the keeper will allow the lion to lick his hand. These familiarities seem natural between an animal and its attendant, but are much different from going into the beast's cage.

The earliest American notice that we have found stating that "the keeper will enter the cage," is dated 1829 and we suspect that such derring-do was delayed so many years vis-a-vis Martin's accomplishment because of the nature of the cages then in use. Early cages were what are now called "shifting dens," boxes with bars on one side, not much bigger than the animal and wholly unsuited for anything but display. These were carried in wagons, unloaded by hand and placed on sawhorses for public viewing. The American Antiquarian Society owns two of the earliest menagerie posters, printed from wooden blocks, each block with an animal's figure shown. One of these is dated 1831, the other 1835. The one dated 1831 advertises June, Titus and Angevine's American National Caravan. It shows animals still exhibited in shifting dens. The poster dated 1835 is from the same menagerie (by then one of the New York units of the Zoological Institute) and depicts wheeled cages. It says that the keeper



Isaac A. Van Amburgh became the most famous of the early trainers. A headliner until his death in 1865, his name was used on show titles until the 1920's. This illustration is from the cover of an 1862 booklet sold on the Van Amburgh Menagerie. Original in Pfening Archives.

will enter the (lion and tiger) cages at two o'clock. Between the dates of these two posters, then, the American menagerie became entirely mobile and the wheeled cages became of a size to admit both an animal and a keeper.

Actually, it is our belief that a special, larger cage was used for "cat acts" and the animals were transferred to it from their travelling cages. No chutes were used, the beasts were led by chain collars or simply guided by hand from one cage to the other.

To return to our 1829 date, the *Pensacola Gazette* (Florida) of November 21 of that year contains an advertisement that reads, "the keeper will enter the respective cages of the lion and lioness." This pre-dates our 1831 poster showing cages still on sawhorses, of course, and we have no answer as yet to that contradiction.

The Pensacola ad was placed by a menagerie that was on the road each year 1826 through 1829 as the New Caravan of Living Animals and in 1830 was titled Carley, Purdy and Wright's Menagerie. Charles Wright (1792-1862) was the manager of the show in 1828, the year in which it became the first menagerie to travel with a circus.<sup>2</sup> He may have been with it earlier, but we have no proof of it. A native of Somers, New York, Wright was in the menagerie business for some time. He was a witness to Hackaliah Bailey's will, which indicates that he was a member of the influential Putnam County (N.Y.) group of showmen.

That Wright was the keeper mentioned in Pensacola would seem to be true based on his positive identification as such in the *Cincinnati Gazette* of March 23, 1830. The menagerie was on the road all winter in 1829-1830. The Asiatic lion and lioness which were the objects of his attention were with the menagerie as early as 1827 and since they and Wright were continuously with it from then until 1831, it would seem that he was our first American "trainer."

The menagerie was titled Purdy, Carley and Bailey in 1831, possibly indicating that Wright had left. If so, someone was still going in with the lion and lioness and we can guess that this was Solomon Bailey's introduction as a keeper. In 1832 the show was named Purdy, Welch and Company, indicating that the "movers and shakers" were now in charge — Eisenbart Purdy and Rufus Welch. Whoever the keeper was in this season, and his name was not advertised, he was an employee, not a partner.

June, Titus and Angevine (we use this name historically, but only one or two of the gentlemen might have been involved this early) had by 1833 hired a keeper for their National Menagerie. This was Mr. Roberts, said to have been sole keeper of animals in the Tower of London for the previous ten years. Actually, Roberts had been an assistant to Alfred Cops, keeper of the Royal Menagerie since the time of George the Fourth. He performed with a Bengal tiger. The *Springfield Republican* (Mass.) of November 9, 1833 reported that Roberts was severely mauled by the tiger in a small town in Connecticut. The Haverhill,



Massachusetts *Essex Gazette* of the same day went further, stating that he was torn to pieces and literally eaten up. Whatever the case, the event may have led directly to the employment of his assistant, or possibly his cage boy, Isaac Van Amburgh.

Van Amburgh, by far the most famous of the early keepers, debuted in the winter of 1833-1834 in New York and was on the road with the June, Titus and Angevine interests until July, 1838. In that month he went to Europe for a seven-year stay, during which his fame was further enhanced. Many writers credit him with being the first American trainer, but as we shall see, there may have been as many as nine men in the profession prior to his appearance.

One of them, who later claimed that

Cages had been put on wheels by the time the New York branch of the Zoological Institute used this poster in 1835. This development allowed both man and beast to occupy the den at the same time. Note the prominence of the line "The keeper will enter the cages to the above animals at 3 o'clock P.M." Original bill at the American Antiquarian Society.

he had entered a den of lions nearly ten years before Van Amburgh had, was John Sears (1804-1875). We first find his name in 1832 when he was proprietor and keeper with the New England Caravan. He continued at the task until October, 1833 when he apparently sold out to Tufts, Waring and Company. However, he did not leave the menagerie trade. In 1858 he had the Great Eastern Menagerie on the

road. His reference to being ten years ahead of Van Amburgh sounds apochryphal, but he may have been referring to Van Amburgh & Co., a title which did not appear in this country until the famous trainer's return from England in 1845. Sears was a menagerie operator until his death, the result of the infected bite of a baboon in his Union Street menagerie in Boston.

Mr. Flint, whose surname we don't know, bowed in October, 1833 at the time of the sale of Sears' menagerie to Tufts, Waring and Company. Flint was the keeper with this outfit in 1833 and 1834, when it was titled Waring, Tufts and Company. He may have worked for the successor title, Raymond, Ogden, Waring and Company in 1835.

Our ignorance as to Flint's whereabouts in 1835 point up a common trait of menageries of the period, their oftentimes reluctance to advertise their keepers by name. Why this should be is puzzling, as they seem to be enough of an attraction to be heavily advertised. What information we do have is as often from editorial content as from paid notices.

Other keepers, identified as to name, who appear prior to Van Amburgh's 1834 debut, include Mr. Putnam, with Purdy, Welch, Macomber and Company in 1833; Mr. Gray with Raymond & Ogden in the same year; William Sherman with Purdy, Welch and Company in 1834; Mr. Butler, who replaced Putnam in 1834 and Mr. Martin (no relation) with S. Butler and Company in 1834. Also, a Mr. Whiting was mentioned as being a keeper with J. R. and Wm. Howe and Company in 1833, but it is not certain that he entered the cages.

Having pointed out who the keepers were, we now turn to what it was they did once inside the cages. If we limit ourselves to comment prior to the advent of Van Amburgh we find that the acts were of a benevolent, friendly nature. We must remember that this was before Darwin's indifferent universe had been discovered and that animals were considered capable of reason and response. Thus, there is none of the "wild animal" routines of later times. "It is truly astonishing," commented the *Painesville Telegraph* (O.) on August 23, 1832,

to witness with what patience and good humor this (lion) suffers himself to be played with; the keeper opening his mouth, putting his hand in his tremendous jaws, pulling out his tongue and even wantonly whipping him, fearless and safe.

The St. Thomas, Ontario *Liberal* of July 25, 1833 adds: "It is very interesting to witness the fondness of the leopard for his keeper during these visits."



In the 1820's cages were little more than boxes with bars on the sides, and were ill suited for anything beyond exhibiting the animals. This fanciful print, dating from that period, depicts Joseph Martin being saved by an elephant after discovering that some of the animals had escaped from their cages.

In the Washington, Pennsylvania *Examiner* of July 12, 1834 there is: the feat of one of the keepers entering the cage and shutting himself up with a lion and lioness, alternately commanding their submission, familiarly playing with them, and thrusting his head into the mouth of one, which was done in the presence of hundreds, excited a good deal of alarm for his safety, of which, however, he did not seem to partake.

All this good humor, this delight and fondness went out with Van Amburgh. Using a crowbar he apparently beat his subjects into submission; several sources confirm this.

Born in 1808 in Fishkill, New York, Van Amburgh entered the menagerie business in 1829, probably as a cage boy, as they're known today. His first advertised appearance was on the stage of the Bowery Theatre in New York on January 8, 1834 in "The Lion Lord," a play constructed around his act with two lions.<sup>9</sup> His fame, during his seven years in Europe, became greater than it had been in America. He returned, much honored, and June, Titus and Angevine, or the surviving partners of that firm, named their menagerie Van Amburgh and Company. His name was to be in the title of menageries and circuses until 1921.

The *London Times* once reviewed his act and printed:

On one occasion the tiger became ferocious. Van Amburgh coolly took his crow bar and gave him a tremendous blow over the head. He then said to him, in good English, as if he were a human creature, "You big scoundrel, if you show any more of your tricks, I'll knock your brains out."

In comparing Van Amburgh and

Henri Martin, the first man to enter a cage, a London paper said that the wary intercourse of Mr. Martin with his menagerie compared with the command exercised by Mr. Van Amburgh, was the mere display of a showman compared with the mastery of Van Amburgh.<sup>5</sup> It would seem that Van Amburgh's wild, roaring animals were more popular than the quiet, friendly acts that preceeded his. This must be the corner stone of his success.

To be fair to Van Amburgh, we must point out that his animals were of some size and reviews of his act almost always indicate that the auditor had never seen such large cats in a menagerie act. This may have had something to do with the keeper's methods. From advertising prior to Van Amburgh's appearance it seems as if the showmen were concerned lest their potential audience be frightened by the sight of a man fondling lions. We think that the public may have been more willing to be frightened than the showmen realized.

A version of this paper was presented at the 1980 Circus Historical Society convention at Baraboo, Wisconsin.

1. Henry Thetard, *Les Dompteurs*, (Paris, 1928) pp. 21-53.
2. Stuart Thayer, *Annals of the American Circus, 1793-1829*, (Manchester, 1976) p. 209.
3. G.C.D. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, vol. III, 680.
4. *The Times*, (London), September 10, 1938.
5. *Spirit of the Times*, (New York), September 28, 1839, quoting *London Monthly Post*.

#### "Keepers" Before Van Amburgh

	1829	1830	1831	1832	1833	1834
New Caravan to Purdy, Welch & Co.	Charles Wright	Charles Wright	Solomon Bailey?	Charles Wright?	Unknown	William Sherman
New England Caravan and Tufts, Waring & Co.				John Sears	Sears and Flint	Flint
Purdy, Welch Macomber					Putnam	Butler
Raymond, Weeks & Co. (1832) Raymond & Ogden (1833-34)				Unknown	Gray	Unknown
Bailey, Brown & Co. to J.T. & J. P. Bailey					Solomon Bailey?	Solomon Bailey?
S. Butler & Co.						Martin
J.R. & Wm. Howe					Whiting	
June, Titus & Angevine					Roberts	Isaac Van Amburgh

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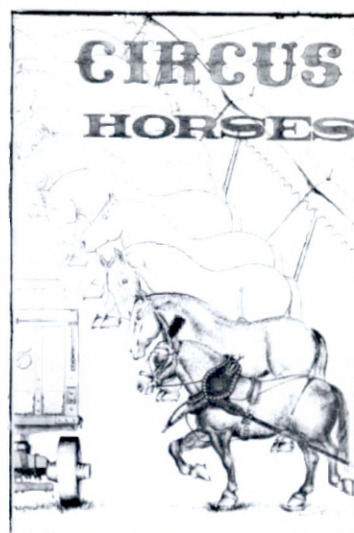


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# Lithographers of the Golden Age

These letterheads honor the companies which created the posters, heralds, and couriers used by circuses during the golden age of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which was also the zenith of show lithography in America. These houses, and others like them, designed, manufactured and shipped hundred of thousands of pieces of advertising to both large and small shows. Not surprisingly, the litho companies often used their stationary to showcase their artistic capabilities, or to impress correspondents with the size of their plant which implied the ability to meet tight delivery schedules.

While all these firms had non-circus customers, a contract with a leading show, a Ringling Bros. or a Barnum and Bailey, was often a company's flagship account. Surviving documentation indicates that major circuses received price discounts, special service—and long letters of contrition when some

foul-up occurred. On the other hand, the litho houses were quick to cut their losses, the result being the large number of circuses that went on the auction block to satisfy the printer's bill.

We remember these establishments because of their logo or copyright at the bottom of the posters which are now prized possessions of museums and private collectors. These bills, and the memory of the companies that crafted them, have endured more by chance than intention.

A few are well known today. Circus lithography and the Strobbridge Company have become almost synonymous, and literally thousands of examples of its work exists. Others, such as Erie and Riverside, live on in posters they printed later; few examples of their work from this period are extant. And some, Compton and Sons for instance, have no known examples of their posters still in existence. Such is the ill-fortune of firms whose product was used only the few

weeks it hung in a shopkeeper's window or on a farmer's barn.

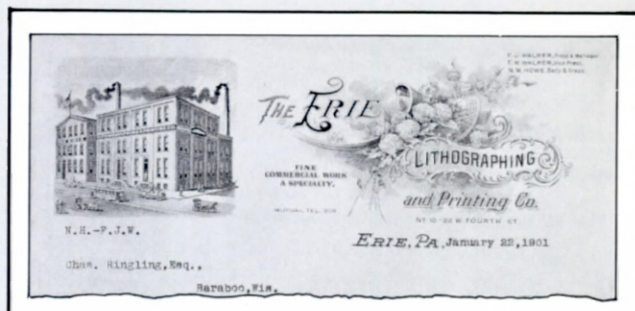
The last living link with this illustrious past is the Enquirer Printing Co., which to this day prints circus posters near the same location as it did when it created the images for the Buffalo Bill Wild West at the turn of the century. A few years ago, I saw Harry Anderson, the grandson of H. J. Anderson, come on the Carson and Barnes lot, where he was warmly greeted by Dory Miller. I immediately recalled the numerous citations in old route books stating that the president of Courier, or Strobbridge, or Donaldson visited a show to "confer" (to use the more formal language of the period) with James Bailey, Peter Sells, or one of the Ringlings. I doubt if Anderson or Miller were aware they were continuing the tradition of close relations between show printer and show owner that may well have started with John Ricketts and the fellow who printed his handbills. Fred D. Pfening III



The most famous of all lithograph companies was Strobbridge. They produced bills for most of the large circuses from the 1870's to the 1950's. This 1882 sheet is in a lime-green. A. A. Stewart was the Strobbridge representative who handled the circus and other show business accounts.

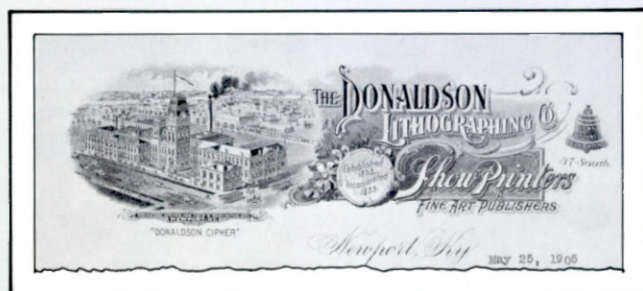
The Enquirer Job Printing Company used this red and black letter paper in 1908. In this letter, H. J. Anderson tried to solicit an order from the Ringling Bros. for the 1909 season. On the bottom of the sheet is the reply, "Contracts all placed for coming season."

The Erie Lithographing Company catered to smaller shows and used mostly stock paper. They printed posters for Scribner and Smith's wagon show in 1893. In the 1920's and 1930's they were a major printer doing work for American Circus Corporation shows, and later for Cole Bros.



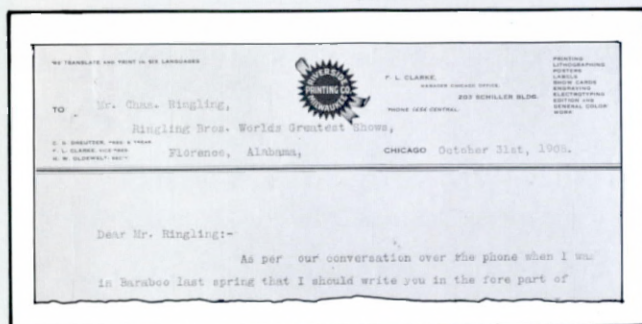


The Courier Company of Buffalo, New York, supplied major shows such as Forepaugh, Great Wallace, and Buffalo Bill. They also did the majority of the posters used by Ringling Bros. from 1890 to about 1906. This 1900 letterhead is in a light purple. All illustrations from Pfening Archives.



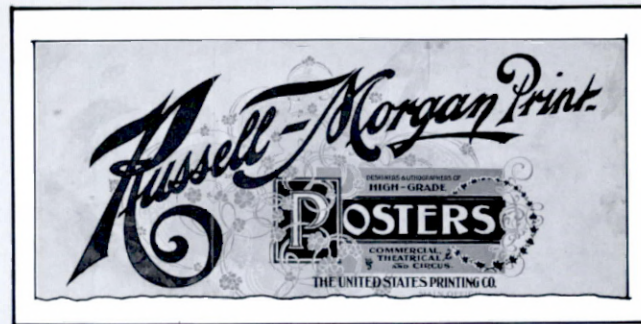
Donaldson Lithograph printed posters for smaller shows such as Oscar Lowande, J. H. La Pearl, and Norris and Rowe; and large ones like Ringling Bros., and Hagenbeck-Wallace. This 1905 letterhead is in black only.

Riverside Printing in Milwaukee specialized in stock posters for smaller circuses. Some of its one sheets, printed in the early 1900's, stayed on the shelf until the 1920's and 1930's when they were lettered and shipped. The crest with the company name is in red on a blue background in this 1908 letterhead.

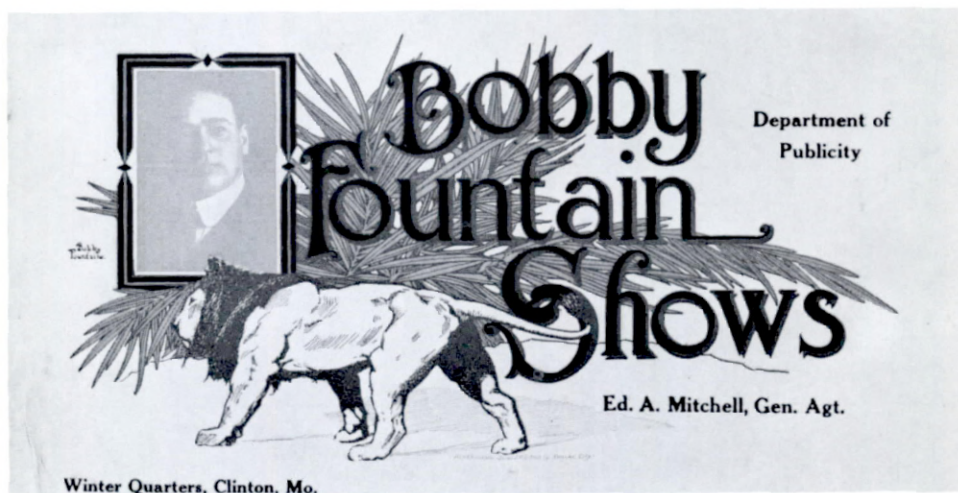


Compton and Sons of St. Louis may never have made a name for itself in circus printing, but they did sell one and two sheets to the Ringling show in 1897. This sheet, in a light green, is from that year.

The Russell-Morgan Company did high quality work for many shows including Barnum and Bailey, Sig Sautelle, and Sells-Floto in its early years. This ornate stationery is in green, gold and red, and was used in the 1890's.



# BILL KASISKA'S LETTERHEADS



The Bobby Fountain Show was a two car circus that played the Western United States from 1907 until around 1912. In 1909 the show toured for 33 weeks and traveled 9,879 miles, closing in Eldorado, Arkansas on December 8. Fountain was outstanding on a side show bally platform, making openings. Following the disposal of his show Fountain joined the Al G. Barnes Circus. He died while on the Barnes show in 1920.

The letterhead was printed by the Ackerman Quigley Litho Co. of Kansas City. The title is in deep red outlined in brown, Fountain's photo and the palm leaves are green.

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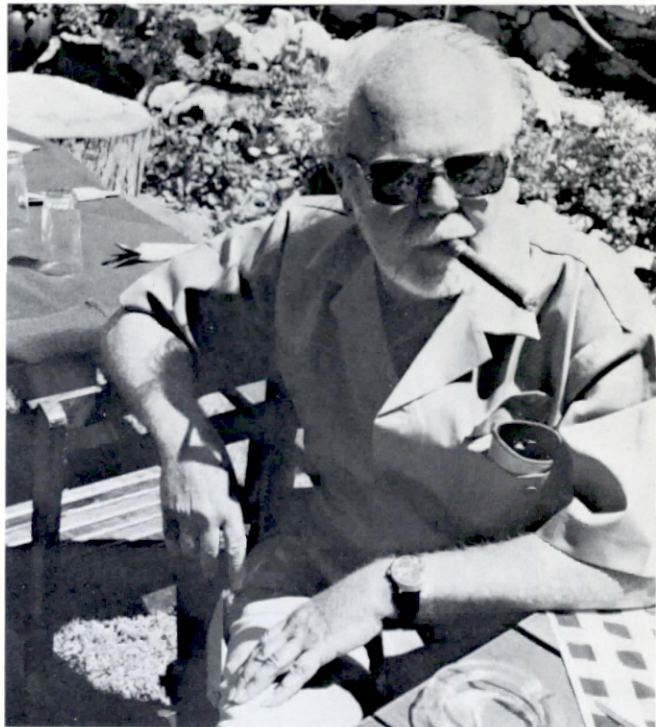
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## SEASON'S GREETINGS

Fred. D. Pfening, Jr. Editor





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